

The  
GREEN  
PATCH

BETTINA VON HUTTEN

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## **THE GREEN PATCH**



# THE GREEN PATCH

BY  
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"OUR LADY OF THE BEECHES" "PAM"  
"PAM DECIDES" "BEECHY"  
ETC.

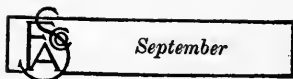


NEW YORK  
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

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## **THE GREEN PATCH**





# THE GREEN PATCH

## CHAPTER I

**T**HERE came a day when Christopher Lambe found that he could no longer bear his wife, his three little girls, Lambe House, Sussex, England in general. He was standing on the downs at dawn, looking at the pallid expectant sea against which a windmill's motionless arms looked as if they were etched by an impressionist master. Lambe loved the world at hours when it seemed empty, and now he stood there shivering slightly, for it was chilly; his hands buried in the pockets of his old green shooting jacket, himself the only human thing in sight. He was a narrow-shouldered man with a long neck and light eyes that were really large, but looked small from his habit of keeping them half closed. He wore no mustache at a time when most men did. His nose was long and delicate and looked through its unusual fineness of modeling and translucent nostrils as though it might in moments of emotion be tremulous. Behind his small figure, down in the hollow, lay Lambe House, a large, square Georgian building, still asleep behind its trees. Lambe had been born there, and his father, and his grandfather, and his

great-grandfather. The ground on which he stood was his and much of the undulating downs beyond the house. He had married some ten years ago and his wife had presented him with three children, all girls, a fact which had grieved her very much, but caused him no particular disappointment. "They are pleasant babies," he told the Vicar, an old Cambridge friend, "they don't cry much." Lady Norah's babies were well brought up and her house well run. There was never the least friction among the intricate wheels of the large household. The servants stayed on and on, as if they meant to die there; the tradespeople served with zeal the great lady who was always civil to them, and nobody suspected that Lady Norah's secret of success was the power of her personality over others. She was, as well as a great lady, very nearly a great woman in some ways; she would have been an excellent Prime Minister, and now, after ten years of smooth-running, stay-at-home life, Christopher Lambe decided to go away.

Speaking aloud to himself, as was his habit, he watched the sky grow rosy with dawn.

"I will go," he said, "to some warm country that will be very agreeable." Then after a short pause he made his way down the long flight of rickety wooden steps that led to the beach, and taking off his clothes walked into the sea. There was something curious in the way he approached the great chilly element now beginning to glitter and dance with the strength of day; he made no pause, took no plunge, showed no signs of the usual screwing up of courage as the water

closed over his warm body; he was obviously as much at his ease in the water as he was on the land. Then he swam. Even yet, the world still looked empty; the fishermen's boats, drawn up high on the sands, were undisturbed by their owners. Nobody stood on the sky line, the great world seemed to belong to the small man swimming by himself.

"Italy or Spain," he said, turning on his back. "Morocco is full of people who write books. Beasts! She won't mind; it will be rather a relief to her, I should think; sometimes I will come and visit her. I will tell her at breakfast." Then he made his way slowly back to the shore and dressed. The church clock struck in the distance. His hair, standing up on his head, giving him a peculiarly wild appearance, Lambe returned to his house. It had a fine façade, there was an air about it of ripe repose and dignity. There was in its stately lines none of the picturesque air of the subtle decay, of the dying away of the old order of things that enhances the beauty of Jacobean or Elizabethan houses. It stood there, strong and steadfast, a healthy, middle-aged man among houses; to carry out the simile further, if houses *were* men, Lambe House was a sedate wearer of a full-bottomed wig. It was surrounded by fine old trees; it was approached by a terrace on which at regular intervals stood ugly stone urns now ablaze with scarlet flowers. To the left was a sunken fruit garden. Beyond the house, out of sight from where he stood, but present to his inward eye, there was an ancient carp pond, relic of an earlier edifice. There

was an Italian garden with statues, there was a sundial, and on the terrace, in stately pavane, walked peacocks pranking in the sun. Nothing was new, nothing too obviously costly, nothing gaudy. A very perfect specimen of its kind, breathing an air of stately comfort.

Christopher Lambe looked down at his own small figure with a kind of whimsical disdain.

"Too good for the likes of me, much too good. I rattle round in it, it's too big." Then he went to his study and partook of milk and fruit, after which he slept for two hours on the only shabby piece of furniture in the house, an old brown leather sofa, which for some reason he loved and had always refused to have recovered.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lady Norah came down the broad staircase with an opulent rustle of silken petticoats, a tall, broad woman with quantities of silky black hair and a healthy red and brown complexion. Behind her, marching at a distance of about three steps apart, the three Misses Lambe. Miss Lambe, Sylvia, was eight; the next one, Susan, nearly seven, and Daffy, the next, was five. They wore holland frocks, their knees were bare, they looked as if they smelt of soap, they looked healthy, obedient and hungry.

"Now, Daphne," began Lady Norah as the last child landed safely on the rug at the foot of the slippery stairs, "call father."

Daphne, who, compared with the pearly whiteness of her sisters, looked much like a coffee bean, stumped.

away to the study door and pounded on its lower panels, the only ones she could reach.

"Hello!" shouted Lambe from within.

"B'kfast," bellowed Daffy in close imitation of his tone. Then the father of the family, his hair now carefully brushed, joined his wife with an absent-minded "good morning," and the quartet went in to breakfast. The little girls had perfect manners of the "speak-when-you-are-spoken-to" kind. Lady Norah, it was plain, did not believe in individuality, so that the three children, who, judging from their faces, must have been quite unlike each other, did throughout the meal precisely the same thing, in precisely the same manner, at precisely the same instant. They were allowed jelly, not jam, because Lady Norah believed that seeds were bad for insides. They had brown bread for their teeth, drank milk for their complexions, ate soft boiled eggs—very soft—to make blood, and when the meal was over each had a large dose out of a brown bottle, the contents of which were supposed to be helpful to the development of bone in the young. Then each child made a curtsy and, headed by Sylvia, they marched solemnly out of the room.

"They look very well, don't they?" remarked Lady Norah as the door closed.

"Very," assented Lambe absently. "Poor little things."

"Why poor?" she asked.

He started. "I don't know, I'm sure, it—it occurred to me. I wonder you don't crop their ears."

Lady Norah smiled tolerantly.

"You really are too absurd, Christopher."

"I know I am, that is why—I mean to say—look here, Norah, I have been thinking."

Again she smiled, and one saw that her attitude toward her husband was one of amused tolerance.

"Have you?" she set down her coffee cup and leaned toward him, her placid face framed by the silver of the coffee and tea services. Lambe watched her for a minute in silence.

"Well, I have been thinking. I think I will go away."

"Yes, why don't you?" she agreed pleasantly. "You look a little seedy; a change might do you good. Why don't you run over to Paris for a few days?"

"Paris in September?"

He ran his fingers through his damp hair so that it stood on end. "My dear!—besides, I don't want to get into mischief, and I always get into mischief in Paris."

"Of course. I thought that is why you went. We have always lived through it, even the snake charmer."

Lambe blushed a helpless blush, a boyish crimson blush that glazed his eyes for a minute.

"That isn't what I mean," he stammered. "I don't want to get into mischief; I am really a very respectable man; but I want to go away. I am tired of all this."

"You don't mean that you are tired of Lambe House?"

"Yes, I am."

"You want to go to town?" she looked like the Goddess of Reason herself, nice, comfortable British reason, as she continued to peer at him through the silver.

"You are always so sensible, Norah. What I mean is—you wouldn't mind very much— No, I don't want to go to London. You wouldn't mind very much if I went away for good, would you?"

Of course she repeated his words.

"If you went away for good?"

"Yes."

"You mean leave home and the children?"

Again he said "yes," watching her with a mild degree of anxiety that to an onlooker would have seemed ludicrously disproportionate to the situation. There was a pause. Then Lady Norah rose and went to the window. She stood for some moments with her back to the room, then at last she turned.

"I am sorry, Christopher," she said slowly, her face very hard. "I seem to have failed, somehow. Of course you will do as you like." She left the room.

## CHAPTER II

**I**T IS impossible that the Lambe children should have felt anything of the electric disturbance in the atmosphere of their home that day. They went through their regular routine as usual.

Miss Ruggles, their governess, imparted to them their daily modicum of pre-digested educational knowledge; they had their usual hygienic lunch at one o'clock, their usual walk after lunch. Lady Norah would have felt herself criminal had she allowed any upset of her own feelings to cause disturbance in the life of her children.

But in spite of these things it so happened that that day was destined to be the first day that Daphne Lambe could in later life recall, because that afternoon took place an adventure never to be forgotten by her.

Three o'clock found the quartet on the sands at the foot of the cliff; Miss Ruggles under an umbrella was regaling herself with Sir Robert Ball's "Story of the Heavens," while the three children, bare-legged and be-trousered, paddled in the sea.

Miss Ruggles was a brave woman, a woman of character; the strength of her mind may be established by the bare statement of the fact that she had never mentioned to Lady Norah during her three years of resi-



dence that her late father had been a rural dean and her mother the niece of a baronet. The bravest of us has a weak point somewhere. Miss Ruggles's weak point was a vast, overwhelming, and unconquerable terror of dentists, and she had a hollow tooth, and the hollow tooth had a live nerve, so that sunny afternoon treated her to a vivid forecast of the pleasures of the Inferno. Sir Robert Ball, to put it mildly, was unappreciated.

"Don't go in too far, Daffy; don't let her fall down, Sylvia. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

The agony was intense. Daffy, who came scampering back for her spade, was struck by the expression of the sufferer's face.

"Is it bad?" she asked.

"Oh, Daffy," cried the poor woman, her eyes boiling over, "it is dreadful."

Daffy scratched her left leg with her right big toe.

"Why don't you take another pill?" she suggested.

"I cannot, dear, it would make me go to sleep."

Daffy rejoined her sisters, and they began a long wall of sand which was to keep down the ocean and guarantee eternal dryness to the upper half of the beach. Presently Lambe, a pipe in his mouth, came aimlessly down the steps. He had no particular air of wishing to come down the steps; it seemed merely that he had less objection to it than to going anywhere else. He was drifting as usual. Presently he drifted to where the governess sat.

"Headache?" he asked pleasantly.

To her own surprise, Miss Ruggles broke down and

confessed to the hollow tooth. Lambe sympathized with her feelings regarding dentists, but when he suggested medicine and she explained that if she took it she would inevitably go to sleep, he ordered her good naturedly to go to sleep. "You look as if you needed it," he added, "I will take care of the children."

Ruggles wavered; she knew she was contemplating a crime, but the tooth raged and bliss was in her pocket in a little Burroughs and Wellcome bottle.

"You are sure you don't mind?" she faltered, although that wasn't in the least her real scruple. "If I could sleep for just half an hour I should be better."

"Mind? Of course I don't," said Lambe, feeling, now that he had made up his mind to leave them, rather drawn toward his offspring. "You go to sleep. There, I will put your shawl over you." Very gently he covered her, put the umbrella over her recumbent head, and after looking at her for a moment, walked away to the right, his head absolutely empty of all thoughts of his children. He would probably have walked on for hours had not Daffy spied him and shouted to him in stentorian tones peculiarly her own, that there they were. Six dripping bare legs sparkled across the sands and a short council was held.

"Like to come for a walk?" he said.

Sylvia, a remarkably beautiful child of the blue-eyed angel type, shook her head.

"Oh, no, father; mother scolds so when you forget us."

"Well, what shall we do, then? I was going for a

swim, but—" he hesitated. "Suppose I take you for a row?"

Poor Ruggles under her umbrella at this period heard in her dream a ripple of delighted laughter and the clapping of small wet hands, but she didn't see the boat dragged down the sands or the gay embarking of the little party, and she dreamed on in peace.

It was a beautiful afternoon. Daffy always remembered the blueness of the sky. The whole world, drenched in sunshine, seemed blue and gold, like a gorgeous banner, and dear father was so pleasant. All children liked him, vague though he was, and his own children, without the slightest spark of proper filial feeling, liked him as well; he, for his own part, was proud of them. They belonged, he felt, really belonged to the fine old house, to the fine old grounds.

The two elder girls sat in the stern and at their feet, apart from them as always, crouched Daffy, browner than ever in the brilliant sun. How two children with the same father and mother could be beautiful and the third one nearly ugly would have puzzled most people, but it did not puzzle Christopher Lambe, because nothing ever did. Susan, the second child, less lovely than Sylvia, would have been in any other family remarkably handsome. Daffy's hair was straight and black and her little frame without any of the obvious chubby charms of her age. She was perfectly well, but she was very thin and she had a velvety brown mole on her right cheek where the other two children had dimples.

Away they went, over the blue waters, in an almost complete silence. Rowing was pleasant exercise to Lambe; his eyes fixed absently on the pretty picture before him, he pulled away for nearly an hour. Sylvia was asleep, her arms around Susan. Susan was eating chocolate. Daffy was doing nothing, her brown eyes fixed on the sky over her father's shoulder.

It was very warm now and the water looked tempting. Lambe had no sense of decorum of his own, but his wife's was very present to him, so before he stripped he made Daffy turn round and ordered Susan, supporting her sleeping sister, to close her eyes. He stood for a moment on the edge of the boat and then jumped overboard. He was a splendid swimmer and it was very pleasant after the heat of rowing.

"May we open our eyes now?" screamed Susan, for he had quite forgotten his embargo; he was out of earshot. Daffy, who was severely logical, opened her eyes the minute he was in the water.

"Of course you may," she said. "Susan, are you sleepy?"

"I am," returned Susan slowly.

"So am I."

The boat drifted and caught in a strong current and the three children slept, Daffy stretched on her face in the bottom of the boat. When she awoke it was to the sound of tears. Susan was sobbing.

"What's the matter?" asked the littlest.

"I want to go home," explained Susan, between loud sniffs. To this day Susan Lambe's tears are larger and wetter than other people's.

Daffy sat up and looked about her. Where was the sun? Above the horizon the smallest possible wedge of gold was rapidly disappearing, sliding down into the sea with terrific haste, like a malignant elder hiding from children.

"Where's father?" asked Daffy.

The other children did not know.

"He's gone," said Sylvia calmly. She had little imagination and an almost Napoleonic power of sleep. "He's forgot," she added solemnly. Father had so often forgotten! Indeed, to forget was one of his chief occupations in life. Even poor little Daffy could remember several of the occasions on which his forgetting had been disastrous to some one of his family. Had he not taken the two elder girls for a walk that very spring and lost them while they stopped to gather flowers, going his way in bland forgetfulness of them and returning home by a short cut and calling for them cheerfully as he entered the house?

"Oh, Sylvia," sniffed Susan, "do you think he'll come back for us?"

"Course he won't," declared Daffy firmly. "I—I wonder what time it is?"

Sylvia laughed and nudged the tearful Susan.

"Susie, dear," she lisped, "Daffy's going to be afraid!"

At this bit of good news Susan, whose small character already bore signs of a kind of malignant mischief that distinguished her later in life, dried her eyes.

"O—o—oh!" she said in a long drawn-out syllable

that for some reason struck terror to Daffy's soul. "It'll be dark soon."

Daffy cast a quick look over the darkling waters and edged nearer her relatives.

"It's—vewy early," she retorted aggressively, struggling with the "r."

"It's going to be dark *soon*," repeated Susan. Her gray-blue eyes gleamed as Daffy's mouth went down at the corners. Daffy was not a brave child, and though constant teasing had given her an unusual amount of self-control, she feared the dark, as much as her mother would have approved her fearing the devil, and her terror was uncombatable by either herself or others, for it was born with her.

"Sylvia, I want to sit near you," the child said slowly.

Sylvia moved and made room for her in the stern sheets; she was as utterly without Susan's malice as she was without Susan's brains, and she was sorry for the little thing with the fixed, terror-stricken brown eyes.

But as Daffy clambered to the place made for her, Susan gave a loud scream.

"Oh, sit down, Daffy—you'll upset the boat and the mermaids will eat us!"

Daffy dropped where she stood. The cannabalistic trait of mermaids was well known to her, and loneliness in the dark was better than being eaten by finny people with long hair.

The boat, which had been caught in a strong current, floated rapidly seaward, and the three children sat silent.

Sylvia, with her usual philosophy, went to sleep again. Susan, who in her joy at Daffy's terror had nearly forgotten her own, was wondering where her father was, and Daffy was watching the darkening of the sky with a stoicism very great in one so young and small. None of the three was, it is to be observed, at all surprised by their father's non-appearance. No idea that those same man-eating mermaids might even then be sharpening their teeth on his bones occurred to them. Father had forgotten; it was perfectly simple; and they were right.

Christopher Lambe, who had swam easily to a little promontory that extended half a mile seaward from just south of the village near which he lived, sat in the lea of a boat, drying himself with handfuls of hot sand. He was rather puzzled at first about his absolute lack of clothes, but the children had quite gone out of his head and he whistled as he rubbed himself. It was warm and pleasant.

"Funny what I've done with my clothes," he said aloud, pausing in his operative selection. "Damn bad memory I've got—" and then suddenly he ducked behind the boat.

Miss Ruggles was advancing on him from the other side, her umbrella moving agitatedly over her head, on which her hideous gray straw hat sat with no regard whatever for symmetry.

"Oh, Mr. Lambe," she quavered, "where are you? I heard you whistling."

"Go away, Miss Ruggles," he answered, looking at her over the green bottom of the "Saucy Liz."

"Go away! But—"

"Yes, yes. You really mustn't come round to this side."

Poor Ruggles's face had swollen during her nap and gave her a dissipated air strangely foreign to her prim nature. She wasn't in the least afraid of her employer's husband—who was?—and in her alarm utterly disregarded his remark.

"I must know," she panted, pursuing him round his barricade, "where—"

Suddenly he leaned over the boat shaking with laughter.

"I shouldn't mind, you know," he said, his thin nose wrinkling absurdly, "but *you* would. I'm—I'm mother-naked, Miss Ruggles."

Miss Ruggles sat down suddenly. Nakedness to her was as strange and horrible as the mysteries of Hell.

From behind the boat came Lambe's still uneven voice.

"I am very sorry," he said kindly. "I didn't want to shock you. Where are you?"

"I'm—I'm here, Mr. Lambe; please put on your clothes at once."

"Bless her! Oh, dear me, bless her! How can I dress when my clothes are God knows where?"

The stricken woman, using the broadest part of her spread, middle-aged person as a pivot, wheeled round and faced the sea. She was weak with pain and drugs, and felt queer.

"Have you been robbed?" she asked faintly.



Lambe, still immensely tickled by the joke, burst out laughing again.

"No, I've been swimming."

Then she found her wits. "Where," she asked in a voice the loudness of which was intended to convey to herself as well as to him the knowledge that, if he was unashamed, she was unafraid, "where are the little girls?"

Poor Lambe. His horror and remorse were very poignant. Abjectly from behind the boat he confessed the truth. And then, as Miss Ruggles for the first time in her dull life nearly fainted, he swore at his clothesless condition. "I can't come out to help you, so you mustn't faint," he warned her, but her mauve lips were now ashen as he peered round at her. "For God's sake, Miss Ruggles," he said, "don't faint. If you do I'll come—I—*I'm coming now!*"

Miss Ruggles was frightened out of her wits, and with a tremendous effort controlled her feelings. A moment later she was hurrying back to the village, leaving her shawl and umbrella with Lambe. When she had gone he twisted the shawl round his loins, and the umbrella shielding him from the sun, he scampered up the path to the nearest cottage.

### CHAPTER III

**M**EANTIME the boat had drifted seaward and night at length really came. For beauty and mystery the approach of night on land cannot be compared to the approach of night on the open sea. When the light goes, whence comes the dark, no one can see, for there are no shadows. The rosy sky hushed itself to gray and the gray sky drew close down over the gray waters. There was no moon. The gray deepened in tone and the air in chill.

Suddenly Sylvia shivered and woke, her teeth chattering.

"Oh, I'm so cold! Are you asleep, Susan?"

Susan shook her head. "I am going to fleeze to death," she declared. A Chinese difficulty regarding the letters "l" and "r" were the great Susan's only concession to childish things in the matter of speech.

"You mustn't freeze, Sue, dear," answered Sylvia, hugging her hand.

"Yes, I shall, like Hobbs's old horse. And then," she went on, peering through the darkness at the silent Daffy, "the mermaids will crawl up and *crawl-claw* me down into the water, and—Daffy knows what they'll do to me."

But Daffy made no sign of having heard. Presently

she moved restlessly about for a moment and Sylvia found herself covered with a thick, clammy something.

"Father's coat," announced Daffy. The two elder children pulled it close round them, and comforted by its gradual warmth, went to sleep in each other's arms. They were not afraid. Alone, in the middle of the boat, her fog-drenched frock clinging to her, Daffy was greatly afraid and trembled. She feared the night, the cold, the hungry mermaids, and most of all, her own hideous past. A list of Daphne Lambe's faults at the age of six would have appalled the head of a boys' reformatory. She was a coward, she was a liar, she was a thief. She was afraid of dogs, of *very* large cats, of bats, of mice, of the second footman, whose chin was blue, of a horrible noise a certain window in the passage near the nursery made when it was stormy; of mermaids, of having her legs pinched by armless hands as she went upstairs after sunset, of the dark. She lied, when asked if she was afraid, lied, as the saying goes, "up and down." And lying, that immortal proverb about the best policy to the contrary notwithstanding, was in her case a comforting and profitable thing, inasmuch as it prevented Susan's even approaching to comprehension of her younger sister's facility for being tortured.

As to thieving, no magpie was worse than the youngest Miss Lambe. She had in a high hollow in a tree that only she could climb, a beautiful cache in which lay, now half forgotten, a heterogeneous collection comprising the thefts of a lifetime. Daffy knew

that stealing was wrong, but its joys decidedly outweighed its powers of conscience troubling.

Apples rotted contentedly down in the long hollow, cheek-by-jowl with Susan's scarlet knitted bed shoes and nurse's original set of false teeth, purloined from a glass of water which, grinning at her in the moonlight, had roused the child's wrath and desire for revenge. A shell-box with a strip of mirror inset in its lid (taken from Sylvia's treasures after Sylvia had broken one of her cadette's dolls) had gone in next, a bottle of rhubarb mixture that was not appreciated in the nursery, a plaid sash of her own that she hated—there were many things in the hollow tree, and the remarkable part of it all is that no one suspected the little girl of being the thief. Silent people enjoy a great natural immunity from suspicion, and Daffy was very silent.

Her crimes lay lightly on her conscience as a rule, but now, in the boat, cold, hungry and in terror of the night, they passed in hideous array before her tightly closed eyes and added much anguish to her tortured little mind. The fact that mere common sense convinced her that to the hungry mermaids her own meager little carcass would appeal much less than the dimpled flesh of her sisters, did not help to any great extent. Her turn would come. And then, dead, she would be judged, and God was, she had gathered from her mother and Miss Ruggles, an implacable Person, with a peculiar loathing for naughty little English maidens.

She coughed. The fog was very thick now and the

darkness seemed palpable. It must have been days and days since father had swum blithely away from them in the sun. The sun seemed a beautiful dream; nothing was real but cold and darkness.

She coughed again, and Susan woke up. Now, Susan was a person who paid the greatest attention to her own symptoms and emotions. Being a trifle frightened, a trifle cold and very hungry, she began to lament loudly, proclaiming her sufferings as though they were unique in the annals of the world.

And Sylvia, always led by her immediate junior, joined in her plaint. They wept huge, wet tears, their little noses stopped, their voices became nasal, and thus they helped each other to a condition of utter misery. Daffy listened stonily for a while and then tried to comfort them. It wasn't so vewy dark, she told them, and they had father's coat.

But the afflicted ones continued to cry and the really terrified Daffy subsided into silence, hugging her knees and wishing she wasn't a damned soul. Suddenly out of the fog came a sound, a long cooe. Then "Hallo—who's there?"

The wailing ceased.

"Is any one there?" went on the voice, a man's.

"*Scream*, Daffy," commanded Susan suddenly. "*Scream hard.*"

And Daffy screamed hard, so hard that a great laugh answered her, and a moment later a light appeared on their port bow and a huge bulk behind it.

"Children, by God!" said the man's voice. A minute later and their little boat lay close to the Heaven-

reaching side of a fishing smack and a man came down a rope and got into their boat.

"You poor little things," he said gently as the boat swayed under his weight. "Who are you and how in Heaven's name did you get here?"

He turned the light of a lantern on them and Daffy saw the great kindness in his blue eyes.

"Come along, I'll lift you up. Come, little one."

He made as if to take Daffy, but she waved him aside.

"Take them first," a touch of disdain in her baby voice, "they are *afraid*." This was her delicate revenge.

The man—he was a very young man, with a tiny mustache, like a canary's wing feather—obeyed with a laugh.

"Servo suo, Maesta," he murmured softly, and took Sylvia into his arms. "You lovely little creature," he said, looking down at her in the lantern light. "Who are you?"

Sylvia curled her arm about his neck and smiled at him, her dimpled, lovely smile that was bewildering even then. But she did not answer. Some one else would do that.

"We are Mr. Lambe's little girls," announced Susan alertly.

The young man then conferred briefly with some invisible person on the smack and Sylvia was swung up into other arms. The young man laughed and stretched his arms. The fairy was fairly heavy to lift up at arm's length. Susan, beautiful too, but

minus the bewildering quality, went next. Then he turned to the aged person who had told him to pass her over.

"Come on, old lady. Well, upon my word, you are the littlest of the lot! How old are *you*?"

"I am nearly six." She was very small and very light, and he could feel her bones under the drenched linen.

"They evidently starve this one," he reflected as he gave her over to the waiting arms above. Suddenly she turned and an enormously stentorian voice came down to him in accents of command.

"Boy," it called, "*don't forget father's clothes!*"

Hughie Gunning burst out laughing.

"Right," he answered, gathering up the garments. "But what have you done with father?"

But when after securing the little boat to the stern of the smack and following his guests up over the side he joined them in the tiny cabin, he saw that his jocularly was misplaced. The Ladies Lambe were not jocular. Susan explained gravely that their father had gone for a swim and forgotten them, and before he could reply Sylvia added, "And we are *so* hungry."

Gunning, who had been out after herring, produced for them such food as he had, and when they had partaken of it with the charming unapologetic greed of the very young, they all went to sleep.

"Just like 'im, sir," explained Job Squirrell, the fisherman, "queer in the head, Mr. Lambe is, they say. *She'll* be frightened enough for anybody, poor lady."

Young Gunning looked meditatively at the little trio.

"Poor wee things," he said. "What a perfect beauty the biggest one is. I never saw such eyes in my life."

Thus came the three Lambes into Hughie Gunning's life. They have not left it yet.



## CHAPTER IV

**F**ROM the moment when she went to sleep in the little cabin of the fishing smack Daffy's memory of that evening became more or less of a blank. She knew vaguely that she had been carried up the steps and across the downs to the house, and that the man who carried her smelt of fish. She remembered being set down before her mother and remorse-stricken father in the hall, and she remembered seeing Sylvia still asleep in Hughie Gunning's arms, but who the fishy-smelling one was she did not know; to her knowledge she never saw him, nor did she learn until some years later.

It is to be supposed that the children were put to bed after their adventure, and any one who knew him could easily picture poor Christopher Lambe's grief and remorse over his unspeakable carelessness. Unfortunately, however, any one who knew him could also picture the beautiful, radiant smile that quite suddenly cut short his lamentations as he burst out:

"However, thank God, they are safe *now*."

It is to be doubted whether Lambe himself ever gave the adventure a second thought except when reminded many years later by one of his two elder girls or Hughie Gunning himself. Lambe's misdemeanors of the kind were so frequent that he was thoroughly used

to them and accepted them with the same philosophy with which a man might accept a squint.

Hughie Gunning never forgot a single detail of his introduction to the three Misses Lambe. He could always shut his eyes and feel the enveloping fog on his face, the easy motion of the old smack, the smell of the bad tobacco James Squirrell was smoking, and then hear a queer little sound that meant the presence of somebody abroad on the great sea in the dangerous fog. He could feel himself stretching over the side into the night calling out, and he always recalled with a laugh the strange and awful shriek sent to him through the darkness by the strong-lunged Daffy, and then the picture of the three poor little waifs as he saw them by the light of his lantern, Susan and Daffy being in the picture mere attributes to the marvelous seraph-like beauty of Sylvia, and always, always, he could, by a slight effort of will, recall the exact feeling of Sylvia's little warm body in his arms and the pressure on his shoulder where she laid her head. To him it seemed the most exquisite trust shown by a child to a grown person; as a matter of fact, Sylvia would at that moment have gone to sleep with her head on the shoulder of a polar bear if one had happened along. Sylvia was sleepy.

The young man, who was himself just twenty, had been brought up in Italy, his mother having chosen an Italian Marquis as her second husband. The Italian Marquis had been dead for some years, and pretty, silly Mabel Gunning was still living in the ramshackle old villa near Sorrento where she had passed three

years, the shortness of whose duration probably had enabled her to regard them as the happiest of her life. Possibly the silliest woman who ever lived, Mabel Acquadolce had yet had the sense to educate her boy in his own country, and the night of the adventure in the fog the young man had been one term at Cambridge and was spending his holiday with two other youths and a tutor in a village some six miles up the coast from where the Lambes lived.

Of all the words in the English language, perhaps the two most mystery-filled are "if" and "but." Think what would have happened to the world if Christ had not been crucified. If Rome had not declined and fallen, it is on the cards that we should this day all of us be Roman provincials. If Napoleon had won the battle of Waterloo who can say what would have happened? That is just the beauty of the argument. "Who can say if—"

To come down to our own times and enter for a moment the political ring, where shall we all be this time fifty years, if Mr. Lloyd George and his supporters succeed in doing away with the Dukes and all the other nice little relics of mediæval times which lend a picturesque glamor to even these matter-of-fact days?

The afternoon of the adventure in the fog Hughie Gunning had been urged by one of his friends to go with him to Newhaven to meet the friend's mother and sister, who were coming back from the continent. Now Gunning was twenty, he was a reader of poetry, he was as healthily romantic as boys of twenty ought to

be ; he was tall, strong, good to look upon, and he was rich. The girl he should have gone to meet, Miss Audrey Bellingham, was eighteen, what her brother called "black as your hat," dancing black eyes, curly hair, white teeth and inspired by the precocious spirit of the most abandoned little flirt that ever lived. She was also, it must be observed, very poor, and her mother, the Hon. Mrs. Frederick Bellingham, was a modern huntress, wily and patient, and what she hunted was a husband for her daughter. If these two young people had met it is more than probable, considering the state of mind Gunning was in, that he would have fallen in love with the girl, and if he had done that it is nearly a certainty that the Hon. Mrs. Frederick would have had them safely tied up within three months ; but for some reason that Gunning loved later to describe as "fate," he preferred to go fishing, and Mrs. Frederick and her girl, unbaited by the presence at the wharf of anything more promising than Jimmy Wilder, who had goggle eyes and eleven brothers and sisters, took the boat train to town and, so far as I know, never even met the young man who had come so near to being the son-in-law of the one and the husband of the other. *If!*

And, through the now clear night, for the fog had lifted, Hughie Gunning went his way over the downs, his body warmed by excellent wine and food the sensible Lady Norah had insisted upon his taking, his young mind ever returning to the thought of the little child he had carried across the shingle, up the steps and over the downs to her home. It is to be hoped

that no normal youth arrives at the age of twenty without dreaming about love, and probably Hughie Gunning had had his dreams like any other. There had been a girl in the Hotel Salsomaggiore two years before, when he had been there with his mother, to whom in a shy and undemonstrative way he had been very devoted; he at the time was eighteen and she only twenty-six.

Then there was a girl with whom he played tennis at Cambridge, to possess whose photograph he would have given much. Also he had for several nights dreamed of a beautiful actress, since become an ornament to the peerage.

But these dreamlets were without particular importance and had caused him no pain and left his mind innocent of all real memories. He himself was convinced that his love for Sylvia Lambe began that very night in the fog the instant the light from his lantern fell on her face. In all events, a vivid recollection of that moment never faded from his mind. He woke up the next morning saying to himself, "Dear little thing, dear little thing!" and a few days later marched over the downs, ostensibly to call on Lady Norah, in reality to gratify himself by a glimpse of his small enchantress, the memory of whom was constantly haunting him. He found her asleep in a hammock and forebore to wake her, much as he longed to see her beautiful eyes open.

Meantime Christopher Lambe had gone, taking with him two portmanteaux and leaving behind three large packing cases filled by himself with some of his

personal belongings and which, he told Lady Norah, he would send for as soon as he knew where he was going to be. People whose minds work in several directions at once, people who are capable of seeing several views of any given situation, will probably find Christopher Lambe utterly incomprehensible; those few to whom is vouchsafed but one view of any case, who can, so to speak, hear but one voice, perceive but one guide at any turning point in life, will understand.

It had come to Lambe that he must go away, so he went; to him it was perfectly simple; it was unbelievable to him that other people should not understand or should yearn for those long explanations the giving or receiving of which made life to him a hideous waste.

He had told his wife; other people would know, of course, but through her; she would do all the telling and that would alleviate matters for her. The man was utterly selfish, conscienceless, ruthless, any of half a dozen dreadful things, but if it had pleased Lady Norah to explain his departure by accusing him of any crime, short of one which would lead to his arrest and incarceration, he would cheerfully have subscribed to her story, and indeed, putting aside the indisputable fact that he was deserting his wife and children, it is to be doubted if ever before a man ran away from home in such a perfectly blameless manner. He had no longing for wild living, he was fastidious to an extraordinary degree, as delicately minded in some ways as a woman, and *Wein, Weib and Gesang* possessed for him no charm whatever, as the story of the

snake charmer must prove. He didn't even care for the blameless music of British Sunday afternoon concerts, whereas the wanton fiddling of the unlawful would have bored him to tears. He did not look on himself as deserting his wife and his children; had he done so he could not have gone. But he was a genial creature, his honest view of the case was that he was going away from a place that he did not like, and was leaving a good woman and three pleasant babies to what he seriously expected to be as great contentment as he knew he would find in their absence from him. He provided Lady Norah liberally with money, he kissed the little girls, and the last that was seen of him from the house he was walking down the driveway with a peculiar air of youthful blitheness.

As for Lady Norah, she was not "one who talked," as the old nurse said; her life went on much as usual. No one dared ask her questions, and it was some two or three years before even the old Vicar dared to inquire when Lambe was coming home. She had never particularly liked him, and never having realized that she did not understand him, had always silently resented the fact that he did not understand her. She was one of those people whose own smallest actions are to themselves of the utmost importance. Her changing one kind of tooth paste for another was considered sufficiently interesting to become a subject for conversation, and what she had said to nurse and nurse had said to her about Sylvia's flannels or the baby's physic, was matter for discussion throughout a meal. With this, a thoroughly good woman, very con-

scientious, believing herself to be very religious, inasmuch as she sincerely bowed down in her heart to her monstrous conception of a God with no sense of justice and no sense of humor. Why she was so convinced of her own importance in the universe, why she believed so thoroughly in her own wisdom, why she so unaffectedly expected other people to accept her commonplace ideas as useful and even brilliant, I don't know, and poor Christopher Lambe, also not knowing, had often wondered. He was too polite to tell even himself that she bored him, but if analyzed this was the chief of the poor woman's crimes—so he whistled as he left the house.

Three years passed before they met again.



## CHAPTER V

“**M**Y dear Norah,” said Christopher Lambe gallantly, coming toward her, “you are looking splendidly!”

She was. In the dingy private sitting room of Bagg’s Hotel, in Albemarle Street, the tall, handsome woman in her well-fitting gown and glossy brown furs was almost radiant. She was not yet thirty-four, and her quiet country life had kept her skin and eyes young.

“You,” she returned truthfully, “look tired.”

“Sit down, my dear. Yes, I am—tired, I mean. How are the little girls?”

His tone was as detached as it would have been had the little girls in question been merely the daughters of some newly found old friend. But she did not see this. Quite unsmiling she gave him the news, gave it in her characteristic way.

“Very well, thanks. Sylvia is lazy, but Susan is very clever. She is going to be brilliant, I think. I have had great trouble with her teeth. But I have had her under an American dentist and he has nearly straightened them. A very ingenious thing made of wire that he tightens gradually—painful, but excellent. Sylvia is doing gymnastics, she is too fat.”

“Oh, yes, and how is the little one?” It is possible

that he could not for the moment remember the child's name."

"Daphne? She is well, too, but very *small*. Nothing seems to make her grow," drawing her tall figure up to its full height as if in reproach of the absent Daphne. "I can't understand why she doesn't grow."

A gleam of amusement crossed Lambe's pale face.

"I never did, you know—much," he ventured mildly, "She may take after me."

Lady Norah looked at him thoughtfully, as if an entirely new possibility were presented to her understanding.

"Yes, she *may*, I suppose. But she doesn't look in the least like you."

Lambe smiled. "I didn't mean to suggest anything improper, my dear. After all, I *am* her father," he added, taking up the poker and inspecting it before he applied it to the sulky fire, "and now may I know why you sent for me?"

"I wished to see you."

"Yes. But why?"

"They all say I ought to—to make another effort." Her handsome face was nearly expressionless as he muttered something about Mrs. Dombey, and when he was again silent she went on, "it would have been nicer if you had come to Lambe House. I am sorry you are ill."

"I am not ill, Norah; I didn't say I was. I said I wasn't *able* to come."

"And of course I thought that meant—you look quite well—and I hardly expected to find you up!"

Then he laughed aloud, and she saw how many more and how much deeper were the lines in his face.

"If I hadn't been 'up,' I should never have ventured to ask such a dragon of virtue as you to come and see me! But take off your very becoming furs and I will listen like a good boy."

When she had obeyed and sat opposite him by the fire, he went on, rubbing his hands slowly.

"Well? Why have you brought me from Italy to this dreadful town at this dreadful season?"

"Christopher, will you not come home?"

She looked at him earnestly. Plainly she was doing her duty, but he was surprised to see in her face evidences of a more personal feeling as well.

"No, Norah," he answered quietly, with a pang of pity.

"Will you *never* come back?"

"Not to stay."

She was silent and he added hastily, "How is Thomas?"

Thomas was his valet whom he had left behind, but who had stayed on in the house.

"Thomas is well, I believe. He would like me to take him on as butler—Gregory is married—but I can't have a butler named Screech."

"No, I suppose not. Besides I want Thomas."

"*Want* him? What for?"

"To be my butler. Why can't I have butlers and things, as well as you?"

He laughed at his little joke, but she did not.

"But you haven't a house."

Lambe lit a cigarette.

"Haven't I? Well, no, perhaps I haven't. But I have a villa and some villas rise to butlers."

Lady Norah stared at him, and when she stared her big brown eyes looked like marbles.

"Where have you a villa?"

"Near Sorrento. Do you remember young—dear me, I've forgotten his name—the boy who brought home the little girls one night when I forgot them in a boat?"

"Yes, young Gunning."

"Exactly, Gunning. Well I met him one day in Naples about a year ago. I was on my way back from Morocco and was in a restaurant. He was there." He paused and poked the fire. His thick curly hair was thickly streaked with gray, she saw, as he bent over the faint glow he had succeeded in coaxing from the best Wallsend, and his hands, though very thin, were brown as well as freckled.

"Go on. What has Mr. Gunning to do with your villa?"

"I beg your pardon. Nothing, *now*. Only, I bought the villa from him, that's all."

Lady Norah wasn't particularly interested, but she was always curious in a well-bred way.

"How did he come to have an Italian villa?"

His mother married a second time one of the Bologna Acquadolces, and he left his villa to her. She got sick of it and exchanged it with the boy for a house he had in London. Then he sold it to me."

"Do you live there?"

"Yes. I've lived there for about six months. I thought I'd try it before I settled down, you see."

Lady Norah paused for several minutes before she answered him.

"Christopher, have you reflected how—how *strange* it is? Just leaving us like this, I mean."

"Of course it is strange. So am I strange. I—I hope it doesn't bother you, Norah?" he added anxiously.

"I hate questions being asked. And it is so queer for the children. They wonder, of course."

After a moment he looked up again. "Why don't you tell 'em I'm dead?" he suggested luminously.

"Christopher!"

"Well, why not? Or shut up. Lots of people think I'm mad."

"Oh, that, yes," she agreed with a slight tone of contempt in her voice.

"Well!"

"Christopher, do try to be rational. Realize that I am not asking you for *my* sake. I am quite happy, that is, happy enough and every one knows I am not to blame. But the children are growing up. I suppose you have no idea how old they are?"

He looked confused for a moment, and then laughed cheerfully at himself.

"Not I! Let me see, the biggest one must be ten, I should think?"

Lady Norah shrugged her shoulders.

"Sylvia is twelve, and little Daphne is eight and has lost her front teeth."

"Oh, of course, if she's lost her front teeth I ought to go back——"

She frowned. "Please don't interrupt me. When you met Mr. Percival in Athens eighteen months ago, you told him you went away because you were tired of seeing corn grow. Now that alarmed him. It really *isn't* sane, you know."

"I didn't say a word about corn. I said I couldn't bear the sight of those great monstrous things like decapitated heads that they pile up in the fields—mongrel—what's the name of 'em? Mongrel-wrangles or something. And I couldn't, I loathed them; and potato fields, I loathe them now. And I hate rain and fog—Oh, my God, how I hate fog!"

He spoke with a vehemence she had never seen in him, but she persevered.

"The little girls need you."

"They don't. That's the beauty of me. No one needs me. You don't!"

"But *they* do."

"Well, I'm sorry. They can't have me. They can have—Oh, yes, I haven't told you that,—you can have money if you like, lots of it. I made no end in copper a year ago. Come, Norah, let me write you a nice fat cheque."

She rose, offended. "I did not come here for money, Christopher. You are, I believe, a little mad, but even you ought to understand that you have no right to desert us. I am only thirty-three, besides."

"You mean——?"

"I mean that if I didn't lead the life of a hermit,

people would talk, and that I can't have for the children's sake."

"But you *always* lived the life of a hermit. I used to drag you up to town by the hair, as paleolithic men used to drag their women into their caves. You don't mean to say you are longing for society?" If she had suggested a longing for ballooning he could not have been more sincerely amazed.

She put on her furs and held out her hand.

"No, but in those days the children were very little and my entire duty was with them. Now they are older and I should like occasionally to see some of my old friends."

There was justice in her plaint and he knew it.

"Wait a minute, Norah," he said slowly, "let me think."

She paused while he thought. The hideous room was nearly dark but for the firelight, and from the wet streets came the sound of hurrying carriages. A boy was crying the evening papers. The ornate clock struck six and a coal dropped into the ashes. Unimaginative though she was, these details remained always in Norah Lambe's mind.

At length he spoke.

"Look here," he said with the pleased air of one to whom an enlightening idea has just come, "Why don't you marry again?"

She gasped and tried to speak, but he went on, holding up one hand to crave her attention.

"No, I am no madder than usual, and I have *not* forgotten that you have already one husband and that

I am he. But you are right about your being lonely and young. You are also very good-looking. I think my idea an excellent one. You can divorce me any day—I'll arrange it. I'll knock you down if you like, and then—don't you see?"

She was silent for some seconds. She had a strange feeling that she understood him better in that extraordinary proposition of his that shocked her nearly out of her wits, than she ever had done before. Perhaps this was because he was really thinking of and for her.

"Thank you, Christopher," she said slowly. "I don't wish for a divorce, thank you. I have no desire whatever to marry again. I think you ought to try to overcome this mad notion of yours for staying away from us. It is wrong as well as mad. But if you won't—then I have no more to say. Except that, much as I should hate to leave England, I would, if you wish it, come to Italy."

Lambe's eyes betrayed horror.

"No, no, my dear. Thank you very much; it is very kind of you, but I wouldn't think of accepting such a sacrifice, in fact I shouldn't like it at all."

"Very well, I will go now. Mr. Percival is waiting for me downstairs. We are going back by the 6.50."

They shook hands, and he opened the door.

"Good-bye," he said vaguely. "Thank you for coming. Remember me to—I mean to say, give my love to the babies."



As she went out, she turned, looking a little like Mrs. Siddons in her majesty of demeanor.

"Remember, Christopher, that they will not always be babies."

He went slowly back to the fire. "No, I suppose they won't," he said aloud, "I suppose they won't."

## CHAPTER VI

**O**F course Christopher Lambe had not been allowed to desert his wife and family in peace, as he himself mentally expressed it.

Unfortunately for him, Lady Norah was one of many brothers and sisters, and both her father and mother came of large families. So that during the first five years of his freedom, Lambe went through several interviews with outraged, or tearful in-laws, and heard himself called nearly every abusive name in the language. 'The worst of this abuse might naturally have come from his brother-in-law, the Bishop, who had the Old Testament to draw on, but the Honorable Thomas Pember was a genial man, and thus the worst words came from some of the women; and for years Lambe used to groan at the recollection of these interviews, which, to do him justice, were, all but two, absolutely unavoidable on his side.

When the family had succeeded in prodding its easy going chief into action, Lambe met him by appointment, feeling in his queer way that he must see Pemberley. This was about a year after his departure from Lambe House, and the two men met in what all the Pemberley tribe called the Town House, a dingy hive-section in Grosvenor Place. It was August, and very warm, and the drawing rooms were shrouded with holland.

Lord Pemberley was smoking. He was a tall thin man with very little hair and a red nose.

"Well, Kit," he began solemnly, "what's this I hear?"

Lambe, who had just come home from somewhere far away, and was very sunburnt, laughed.

"It's probably quite time, Otho," he answered. "I have deserted my home and fireside, I have disgraced the name of Englishman."

His brother-in-law eyed him curiously.

"Where've you been?"

Lambe told him.

"With a woman?"

"Good Lord, no! And I don't drink, nor gamble. I am a remarkably virtuous man, Otho. I don't like home life, that's all."

"Humph!" Lord Pemberley's wife, who had presented him with five plain women-children, and no son, was not lovely in his eyes.

"You see," went on Lambe, smoking comfortably, "I'm not quite sane. I mean to say, if other people are sane, then I must be a little mad. I have nothing whatever, as I need hardly tell you, against Norah. I appreciate her. She is good and not at all bad-looking, and people like her. The trouble is just that I don't; *like* her, I mean. She bores me to death, Lambe House bores me to death, the details of education bore me. So do governesses and progress in lessons."

"Bore everybody," grunted Pemberley, "but you have to put up with 'em."

"Oh!"

"Well, I mean to say, I don't like hearing about how brave or how cowardly they were at the dentists, or how dull about the Queens of England, or how they say their prayers, but—look at me!"

Lambe looked. Then he said with an extremely grave face:

"A nice example *you* are, Otho."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," explained the little man, gazing up at him, "that when Maud began boring you, you took another wife, that's all."

Pemberley gasped and behind his red nose (an effect of defective circulation, not drink) his face paled unbecomingly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you blessed old ostrich, did you *really* think no one knew? We *all* know, bless you, even the Bishop. And as for me, I am shocked and grieved. It's insulting to Maud, you know. I'm not insulting Norah."

"Maud doesn't know, if you mean—about—hem—ha—she doesn't know."

"Oh, *doesn't* she? You go home and ask her if she doesn't. My dear fellow, people *always* know things; haven't you learned that yet? Now I think I'll go. I came because you are the head of Norah's family, but you really mustn't scold me, you see."

Pemberley had some dignity and mustered it now.

"This is all very well, Lambe," he said, "but Norah

is my sister, and you are hurting her and I have a right to protest against it, whatever I may do myself that you don't like. If my wife's people object to my actions, they haven't said so. Now will you behave like—like a gentleman and go back to your family? You needn't stay at Lambe House all the time, you know. There is no reason on earth why you shouldn't travel. We might go over to Paris for a fortnight at Christmas time——”

Lambe burst out laughing.

“And do the naughty theaters and balls, and bring our wives a Cartier brooch apiece? No, thanks. My mind cannot grasp the turpitude of yours. I am a good man, Otho, and you are a thundering old scoundrel. Good-bye.”

He left the room still chuckling, and Lord Pemberley, who had combined this interview and a necessary visit to his dentist, followed him, after a short interval, and called a hansom. Lambe was a hopeless fellow, he reflected, as he jerked along through the deserted streets. And as to there being no woman in the case, it was of course not true. And thus ended the interview with the Earl.

The Bishop ran him to earth in Munich, late in the following November.

Lambe was standing in a perfectly dark room in the museum, looking at one of the “Nativities,” that set far back behind glass in a niche in the wall, presented a most perfect picture of the shepherds watching by night.

There is a world of romance and beauty in the very

words, "watching by night," and the genius that inspired this most delectable of collections has surpassed itself in this scene.

The sky is a velvety dark blue pierced with stars that are made of real light. On the right, on the hillside, are the shepherds among the drowsing flock. A palm tree droops in a sharp line athwart the distant landscape and the sky, and on the left, in a cunningly contrived ruin, three feet high, lie the mother and child. Their minute faces are really beautiful. They are not dolls, they are tiny statues posed by a great artist; and, standing quite alone, leaning on the brass rail before the glass, Christopher Lambe forgot that he was looking at a work of art.

The humble peasant girl with her 'divine child seemed to live under his eyes, which grew wet before the poignant pathos of the simple scene. And above the startled watchers by night, shone the great Star from which a shaft of light swept the earth and a snow-white angel pointed to the stable whither even then the Wise Men were hurrying with gold, frankincense and myrrh. It was utterly quiet in the little room and Lambe's soft hat was squashed under his arm, for he was in a sacred place.

Then the Bishop touched his shoulder and he dropped his hat and started.

"Good gracious, Tom, you here!"

The Bishop, a heavily built man with as rosy gills and benign eyes as a bishop should have, shook hands with him.

"My dear Christopher, I am glad to have found

you. The porter at your hotel luckily remembered where you were and I followed you."

"I see."

"You look well."

"Quite, thanks. Yes, I am blessed with excellent health."

The Bishop was young for one of his ecclesiastical rank and assumed a breezy, youthful manner.

"Now then, my dear fellow, Pemberley told me of his interview with you. I quite understand. The best fellow in the world, old Otho, but, well, he hasn't much sense of humor, and to understand *you*, Kit, a man needs a great deal of that valuable spice of life. I have told them from the first that they went at you in the wrong way. 'Leave him alone,' I said, 'and he'll come home.' "

"Like Miss Bo-peep's lost sheep? Well, Tom, I might as well tell you at once——"

The Bishop took his arm.

"It won't do, Kit, it won't do. You have had your holiday (and I don't mind confessing to you that dear Norah would rather bore me too, if she was my wife), and now you must be a good boy."

Lambe turned away and fixed his eyes on the mother and child in the stable.

"Wait a minute, Tom," he said slowly. "I want to look at this again. It's far better than a church."

"Very pretty, I'm sure. *Quite* charming for a puppet-show," commended his Lordship blandly.

Lambe turned, frowning.

"You have no more real reverence than—than a

codfish. You are looking at the Story of the World, and you call it 'very pretty.' Oh, come away."

He stalked angrily into the next room, and without pausing to look at the other "pictures," led the way down the great stairs. Half-way down the Bishop recovered himself.

"I know you don't mean to be rude," he began, only to be cut short again.

"I do. I mean to be very rude, indeed. My life is absolutely a harmless one. It may simplify matters if I give you my word at once that there is no woman in it—and no women. That I don't drink petrol in bed, or gamble in Chinese Hells. I look at pictures and see plays; I have been in a little war since I saw you and got potted in my leg. That's why I limp. And I have lived in a sailing boat for months at a time. And I have fooled about with the people who happened to interest me and lain on my back and looked at the sky which is blue, and—and so on, and so on, and so on. That's all."

The big prelate looked down at him.

"I see," he said slowly. "I don't understand, but I believe you, Kit."

"Thanks for believing my word of honor!"

"Wait a minute. I do believe you, and I'll do my best to make the family——"

"Oh, damn the family! I want to be let alone, that's all. I've made a good deal of money. Copper. And the little girls shall be rich. Norah can have any amount of money. But, for God's sake, don't let 'em all get after me. I've had Sophy Cresborough, old



Pelican, and Maria, and Corisande—God, what a tongue!—and Pemberley, and Jack, and Arthur, and even poor old Bill. If any more of them attack me, I'll lose my temper!"

The Bishop, who was a very good fellow, laughed.

"Poor Kit! Well, I've done my best. I can do no more. *I'll* not bother you again. Will you dine with me to-night?"

Lambe shook his head.

"I'm off this afternoon."

"Where to?"

"I don't know yet. Away from this. Good-bye, Tom."

The Bishop held out his hand, which was large and well-cushioned, and Lambe shook it heartily.

When they had separated at the door, the Bishop taking a droschke, Lambe starting off on foot, the carriage came to a sudden standstill.

"I say, Tom, what's your hotel?"

"The Continental. Why?"

But Lambe went his way without answering.

That evening the Bishop received from his prodigal brother-in-law a cheque for two thousand pounds and a short note:

"DEAR TOM:—This comes from copper mines in America. Use it for poor people if you can—for the kind that don't get taken care of by institutions.

"Good luck to you.

"CHRISTOPHER LAMBE."

## CHAPTER VII

ONE morning in late February, nearly five years and a half after his leaving Lambe House, Christopher Lambe was sitting in his garden by the sea in Italy.

He sat in a long pergola covered with flowering roses and jessamine, that stretched from the marble parapet over the sea straight back to a small open place in which most musically splashed a fountain.

Before the little man sparkled the blue bay, to his right and left another pergola stretched, covered, this one, with a very delicate fretwork of pale green leaves, and in the little open space where his long chair stood by a beautifully carved stone table he was in the full sun of nine o'clock.

He was reading a Neapolitan newspaper, and on the table stood his breakfast: coffee, rolls, eggs, and grapes like great globules of golden honey.

From the pergola that stretched away in darkness behind him came the mellow piping of a prisoned blackbird. The knowledge that the unseen cage was built of osier and was of a large, rustic shape, pleased Mr. Lambe. The romance of beauty in even humble things had in the last years grown to mean much to him.

From a low ivy-covered hood of gray stone at his

feet arose a third sound, a gurgling, soft noise rather like a deep-voiced child's chuckling to itself. Lambe listened. He was exquisitely happy at that moment and the gurgling voice mingled with the singing of the blackbird and the splashing of the fountain gave him the keenest pleasure compatible with utter rest.

He was now forty-one and looked very well. His curly gray hair was a trifle longer than most Englishmen's, his face and hands were burnt by many suns to a warm brown; surmounted by this brown hue, his eyes looked the color of blue flame. He wore gray flannels and a silk shirt with a soft collar, and his narrow feet were in spotlessly white, rubber-soled canvas shoes.

He was eating his egg, his badly printed little paper balanced in front of him against the coffee pot, when a footstep caused him to look up. From the invisible house on his left, a man was coming toward him.

"What is it, Tommaso?"

Thomas Screach, now butler, presented to his master a card on a salver.

"Mr. Salvatore, sir; 'e's in the drawing room."

"Good. Ask him to come out here. And Thomas—if Donna Mabel should come, ask her to wait in the house—or in the lower garden, will you?"

"Very good, sir."

Thomas went his way and a few minutes later Signor Salvatore Santi, of Rome, was seated near Mr. Lambe at the other table.

"Well, Salvatore," began Mr. Lambe abruptly, like an excited child, "have you got it?"

"Si, Signore!"

Young Santi, a really rather beautiful youth of the smooth, brown, Roman type, bowed his head as politely as the exigencies of his collar would allow.

"I got it the day before yesterday. It is perfect, Signor Lamm-a. In the Poggio, near the Diana, it will be divine."

"How much was it?" inquired Lambe, pouring out more coffee from a beautiful old silver pot.

Young Santi named a sum large enough to startle the ordinary rich man, but Lambe nodded, satisfied.

"And when can you get it down here?" he added. "By Tuesday?"

"Signore! It will be difficult. Sarà difficile."

But Lambe knew that "It is difficult," is an Italian euphemism for "impossible," and dismissed the very possibility of impossibility with a wave of his hand and a quick frown that the young antiquarian knew. "*Tuesday*. This is Thursday. Lots of time, Salvatore mio."

He spoke very correct, idiomatic Italian with a strong touch of the Sorrento accent.

"Now let's go and settle on the exact spot for Tuesday."

Together they passed along the pergola to the left, turned, on reaching the house, sharply to the left again, and walking over a long stretch of lawn that was the envy of all the neighboring villa owners,

opened a green door in an ancient brick wall and found themselves in the orange orchard.

The air was pungent with the smell of oranges in the sun and apparently the orchard had no end. Away it stretched on all sides, seemingly a boundless forest of beautiful trees, thickly clustered with fruit that glowed like lamps among the splendid glossy leaves.

The two men walked on in the sun-flecked shadows until they came to a broad avenue on either side of which stood, at restful intervals, statues or amphoræ—great stone or marble bowls and vases, ancient oil and wine receptacles, as beautiful in shape as though they had sprung up out of the earth like the trees themselves.

“The girl with the dove looks very well from here,” mused Lambe happily. “Just *look* at her chin!”

Young Santi forgot his beautiful patent shoes and his genuine London-made gloves. His dark eyes gleamed as he gazed.

“Beautiful indeed, sir. And I am convinced we had a great bargain in the black-handled vase. My father says he could swear it is not later than 400 A. D. An American gentleman is trying very hard to get one like it, but Santi è Figli do not manufacture antiques,” he added with professional pride.

“Quite so. You think the new treasure should go opposite the Diana? Better than at the crossways, eh?”

The young man reflected.

“Yes, sir,” he declared definitely after a pause.

“I like the empty space at the crossways opposite

the Pompeian lady. And the 'new treasure,' as you rightly call it, will go beautifully against that clump of lemon trees. It needs a background."

They walked up the avenue until they came to where it was bisected by another. It was very beautiful. The place was so vast, the foliage so abundant and so rich in quality that the chaste whiteness and pale brownness of the beautiful antiques acquired a new value by their surroundings. There was no effect of crowding, of arranging for show.

Each statue, each great vase could be seen by itself against its background of leaves, and if Pan himself had come peering up round a tree, no imaginative person would have been much surprised.

There was a Pan, a grinning brown fellow some two thousand years old, but he had a nook all to himself hidden deep among creeper-hung lemon trees, to whom he played his pipes in all weathers and where, it was believed by the peasants, he descended from his pedestal to dance in the moonlight.

Turning to the left, Lambe led the way to the place where his new purchase was to be installed.

It would be hard to imagine anything more beautiful than the Poggio as the sun filtered down through its leaves, each one of which shone almost like a tiny mirror. To the left now came a row of lemon trees with great pale globes of fruit, nearly quite ripe, and beyond, still paler, hung clustered grapefruit.

"Strange how many different yellows there are in oranges," Lambe said presently.

The young Italian nodded.

"Yes, from here," the young man added, throwing back his head, and half closing his eyes, "I should say I can see at least twenty different shades."

And now they had come to the place. On their right stood the Diana, a lovely, lithe lady, strong legged and deep-chested, with a bow and arrow in her hands and a beautiful uplifted smile on her marble face. She was running, and the wind that had cooled Greece over two thousand years ago had swept her drapery back from her flying limbs, and blown out her hair as she ran. It was a very beautiful statue and no one but Christopher Lambe would have exposed it to even the benign rains and winds of that favored climate.

Young Santi looked at her adoringly.

"And you still don't regret putting her here?"

Lambe threw out his hands in a sudden gesture.

"My dear Salvatore, imagine *her* shut up within four walls. It would be as bad as shutting up a bird in a cage."

"And your blackbird in the pergola?"

Lambe's face fell.

"You are quite right, but at least the blackbird sings, and I have my beautiful concert every morning at breakfast. If this lady were caged, she would not sing. Upon my word," he added, looking at the exquisite marble creature before him, "I believe her hair and her draperies would droop like a flag in a calm, and she would drop her bow and we should find her a miserable heap on the floor."

Having decided on the exact position for the new

purchase after stopping to examine the different beautiful bits of statuary, most of which Santi's father had been instrumental in securing, they made their way back to their house.

At the far end of the garden, on the side of the house opposite to that where Lambe had breakfasted, the sea had encroached on the land for several hundred yards, cutting for itself a kind of small bay. From the Poggio, a flight of stone steps led to what was known as the Cascade Garden.

The two men went down these steps and stood for a minute leaning over the wall at the head of the bay where the cascade roared down the rocks that were the end of the property on this side. Beyond the ravine through which the water poured to the sea, there was a small sandy beach at the back of which, close to the rocks, stood several bathing boxes built of natural wood. This beach was reached by a narrow path leading to the edge of the turbulent water at the foot of the cascade and this by a single spanned bridge that was painted bright red like a famous one in Japan. It was a lovely spot, unexpectedly wild and dramatic, after the Greek peace and serenity of the Poggio.

Turning to their right Lambe and Santi continued their way seaward, looking affectionately at the exquisite, broken shafts of giallo antico that bordered, on their right, the concrete path on which they walked.

"Honey and amber," commented the Italian. "I think on the whole I like the fluted ones best, although the grain of the marble shows better in the plain ones."



'At the corner where they turned to the right to go toward the house, their way led through a small steep tunnel in the rock which, set diagonally, ended about fifty feet from the cream-colored wall of the house in a small garden from which was borne to them as they emerged, out of breath, an almost overpowering smell of heliotrope. It grew in the garden beds, as Lambe said, "like Christian heliotrope;" it clambered round the archway of the tunnel, and high on the walls of the house in a pagan luxuriance, and in the silence, broken only by the voices of fishermen and children on the beach far below, the air throbbed with the booming of bees.

"Just look at the color of the sea above the purple!" exclaimed Lambe with a sigh of joy.

Then they passed along the little terrace in front of the arcaded lower story of the house, and by a steep flight of steps, at the far side to the upper garden, and through the pergola, back to the breakfast place.

"Now then, you must have something to eat, as you really must catch that train and I shall expect you and 'It' here on Tuesday, without fail," said Lambe.

On being summoned by a cunningly hidden electric bell, Thomas brought food and wine. The young man, after a hasty meal, took respectful farewell of his patron, whom he heartily liked and admired and whom he as heartily believed to be half mad, expressing it to himself by the phrase, "There is no Friday in his week," equivalent to the English one, "A screw loose."

When he had gone, Lambe heard a slight cough and, turning, saw Thomas.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the servant, twisting his mouth in a way that meant, Lambe knew, respectful sympathy, "She has come."

"Where is she?"

"In the library, sir."

## CHAPTER VIII

**D**ONNA MABEL ACQUADOLCE was not in the library when Lambe found her. She had wandered thence through a gallery out through the rock down to a little cloistered grotto almost on a level with the sea.

In the days when the villa belonged to her husband, this grotto had been a favorite spot of hers and she still loved it.

When Lambe joined her she was sitting on the broad ledge that would have been the window-sill had the arch above it been glazed, and, her small feet in their preposterous red shoes wedged tightly against the other side of the opening, her knees in the air (for the arch, one of them, was narrow), she was listening to the gentle splash of the waves in the piled up rocks twelve feet below her.

The face she turned to Lambe as he entered the grotto had been very lovely and was still nearly pretty in the shade of her broad flower-decked hat. Her little nose was straight, her little mouth charmingly shaped, her blue eyes, though faded, alight with interest in things, and very bright. Her cheeks were very rosy, but it was the rosiness of chemical skill, not of nature.

"Good morning," she cried, holding out her left hand, which happened to be nearer to him than her right, "I thought you were dead, or something."

"Sorry. I have been busy. Did Thomas get you your *rinfrescanti*?"

"Yes, thanks. I had foie gras sandwiches and a lemon squash. It is very warm to-day, but as you know, I don't mind heat, and as I had news for you, I just ran over early. I have come to lunch, if you don't mind."

Lambe bowed courteously, and drawing up an old cane chair, sat down. "What is the news?"

Donna Mabel felt with some difficulty in her pocket, which she had to drag from under her. Then she looked in a blue silk bag which hung at her belt, and at last found a letter. "From Hughie," she said, fumbling for her lorgnon. "He has been to Thingummy, and seen your girls. I think he's in love with one of 'em, and I have such a grand plan!"

Lambe had, so to speak, acquired this lady with his villa.

Donna Mabel, having exchanged it for her son's house in town, listened delightedly to the negotiations for the sale between her son and the strange little gentleman at the hotel Aurora, and then the moment the sale was concluded and Villa Acquadolce was Christopher Lambe's, she wanted it back. It was *her* house, she said, and so how could it be Lambe's? As if conjured away by the wave of a wand, her longing for London ceased. London was dark and smoky, and its inhabitants lived on raw mutton and boiled potatoes, and her dear Livio would hate her to go to such a dreadful place.

The accuracy with which, since his death, she had

read Livio Acquadolce's mind is perhaps not exceptional among widows, but it made life very trying to Hugh Gunning, who was the best of sons and who honestly believed his chief duty in life to be the pleasing of his poor little mother.

At first he reminded her of her former convictions that the defunct Livio would have wished her to spend the remainder of her days "among her own people, in the country she had deserted through her love for him." But reminding people of their opinions of yesterday or yestermornth is a thankless and a futile task, as this young Gunning speedily learned.

"I said that before the sale? Well, I was wrong, very wrong," she declared, unashamed of her change of front. "He brought me here as a bride, and we were happy here, and you would have been born here if we hadn't stayed a little too long at Aix. Go away, Ugolino, you mean well, I know, but you were only two when your darling father died, and it stands to reason that I know more about what he would like than you do. *Of course* he'd want me to stay here."

She was gifted, the little bright-eyed woman, with the facile tear, and poor Hughie felt himself a monster when she dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"But you see, mother dear, you *can't* stay here," he explained with the greatest patience, over and over again.

"If that man is such a brute as to hold you to your bargain—and he is *much* older than you!—then I

can at least live on in the neighborhood. I suppose he can't have me expelled from the village!"

For a long time Donna Mabel had peresisted in regarding the new owner of Villa Acquadolce as a usurper of her rights, and she used to cross her fingers over her thumbs, extending the first and the little fingers when she met him.

This seems to the uninitiated a harmless enough form of revenge, but those who know Italy will understand its menace to Lambe. He himself, delighted with his new property, knew nothing of it until poor Hughie told him.

"I think you ought to know, sir," the young man said miserably. "I—I have tried, but I can't stop her."

"Oh, well, let her cross her fingers and her toes too, if she can. It can't hurt me," returned Lambe, good-naturedly.

"It can ruin you, sir," the young man declared.

"Nonsense!"

"But it *will*. Not one of the tradespeople will supply you, not one of the workmen will come near the house, once it gets round. There's not a bit of use laughing at the Evil Eye. The fact that the people all believe in it makes it a fact itself. I—I really don't know what to do."

Lambe, who was eating oranges as they walked in the Poggio, while they talked, wiped his silver clasped knife on the grass and put it into his pocket.

"Well, what are we to do?" he asked.

Then they conferred seriously.

The result of their council was that Lambe called on Donna Mabel, and invited her and her son to come to stop with him at the villa until she should have found a suitable house for herself in the neighborhood.

"I am delighted to learn from your son," he added genially, "that you are going to become my permanent neighbor."

"Yes. I feel that my dear husband would not like me to leave the place where we were so happy."

"I see. Now when will you come? The workmen will be out in a fortnight, suppose you come then? And perhaps you will give me the benefit of your taste in my little arrangements?"

Donna Mabel assented gladly. She was one of those women who never refuse an invitation of any kind. Lambe established her and Hughie in the wing in which they had lived previous to his coming and they stayed for four months.

Hughie Gunning came into a good deal of money when he was twenty-five, but at that time he was twenty-three.

The visit to the villa quite put an end to the crossing of Donna Mabel's fingers, but alas! for Lambe, it confirmed her in her idea that Villa Acquadolce still, ethically, belonged to her. She greatly enjoyed advising Lambe about the alterations he found necessary to be made in the house, but after some six weeks she discovered that her advice had never once been taken and there was a storm. Lambe, with his hands in his trousers pockets, listened quietly. He had now been long enough in Italy to learn to appreciate

the reasonableness of young Gunning's alarm about the Evil Eye. He knew that he could not afford to acquire such a reputation and willingly paid the price necessary for avoiding it, but he could not allow Donna Mabel Acquadolce or anybody else to dictate to him about what should be the arrangements and details of the house in which he intended to spend the rest of his life.

"Ah, yes, I see," he said; "you object to the verdi antico pillars in the big drawing room? That is because you know nothing of building. You see, I have pulled down the wall between that room and what used to be the little red boudoir, which makes the ceiling too long for safety; without those pillars, the whole ceiling might fall down on our heads some day after dinner. How would you like that?"

"I don't," declared Donna Mabel, "approve at all of the wall being torn down and——"

He interrupted her, his blue eyes fixed on her, his small face suddenly rigid.

"Whose wall is it?" he said.

"Of course if you're going to be rude——"

Then Lambe took her hand.

"Dear Donna Mabel, you know I am not rude, you know how great is my regard for you, but after all it is I who am going to live in the house, so why grudge me my green pillars? I quite acknowledge the success of the crimson brocade that you chose in the library as well as the decoration of the west wing, but in this I fear I cannot take your advice."

Now Donna Mabel knew as well as he did that she



had suggested neither the crimson brocade nor the decorations in the west wing, but supposing he had forgotten and believed both these successes due to her, it followed, as day follows night, that he must admire her taste. So why remind him that she had suggested things quite different?

A month later she was clamoring for applause about the beauty of the pillars in the drawing room, due to her inspiration, and Lambe congratulated her bravely.

Something of Italian subtlety had come to the little man since he had lived in that delightful country. He had been bored by the lady with the chemical complexion in a way that put his former boredom to shame, but he rather enjoyed baffling her, and after all in some small matters she was useful to him, for while he developed a very decent artistic sense, he remained to the end of his days ridiculously ignorant of the minor details of housekeeping. Donna Mabel did very well in the matter of drapery and bed linen, and it was she who discovered that the first cook he engaged was supplying, by means of a basket, a rope and a boat at the foot of the cliff, his entire family, numbering eight souls or rather eight stomachs, not only with the necessities but with the luxuries of life.

At the end of the fourth month after her arrival the villa was in perfect order and in the hands of competent honest servants. Then Donna Mabel departed to a small house about two miles inland and peace descended on Christopher Lambe.

Lambe had chosen the house for Donna Mabel; the

road to it was rough and very steep, but the house itself, formerly inhabited by a German painter, was large and comfortable, suspiciously large and comfortable for the money she had paid for it. As a matter of fact Lambe had had secret dealings with the late owner and when Donna Mabel's purchase was complete, he found himself some few hundred pounds out of pocket, which was compensated for by the feeling that he was henceforth safe from more than semi-occasional visits from his late guest. This sweet hope proved a fallacy, for Donna Mabel, enchanted with what she believed to be the cheapness of her bargain, at once found that she could afford a pony cart in which she made almost daily visits to the villa. She was not exactly a fool, nor was Lambe one of those who suffer fools gladly, but he had no alternative but to receive her with apparent pleasure, and she was perfectly satisfied with the welcome he always gave her. She was the fly in his ointment, she was the cloud on his horizon; she was the one flaw in his otherwise perfectly happy life, but having made up his mind that he could not afford to make an enemy of her, he accepted her like a wise man, as he accepted occasional rainy days without murmuring, even to himself.

## CHAPTER IX

**D**EAREST Mother," Hughie Gunning's letter began. "Thanks for yours. What is it you want me to get you? I cannot read the word at all and to whom am I to send the Kipling book?

"I went to see Aunt Liliass on Saturday, as you asked me. Her new husband must be at least twenty years younger than she and looks an awful bounder. She seems pleased with him. She sent you her love.

"I think there's no other news, except that Major Luscombe is dead; he dropped in a fit at his club.

"I am very well, and have been down stopping with the Grahams at Brighton. Nice cheery people they all are. On Sunday I went over in Bill's motor to see the Lambes.

"Sylvia is a wonder. She is very tall, and has simply the most beautiful face I have ever seen, even in pictures."

At this point Donna Mabel stopped, and looked up at Lambe in the midst of a smile.

"How old is she?" she said.

Lambe, who through a long course of coping with the little lady's obstinate omniscience, had grown to regard himself, in juxtaposition to her, as a rather determined wise man, greatly disliked exposing to her

his own weak points. He had no idea how old his eldest daughter was; he could not have told, if his life depended on it, how long he had been away from Lambe House, so he had no means of calculating.

"Oh, she's getting to be a big girl now," he said, with a solemn wag of his head. "She'll be very tall now, as he said. Her mother's people are all big. I have often wondered how Norah ever made up her mind to marry a shrimp like me. Oh, go on, go on," he added briskly, "it is a very interesting letter."

Donna Mabel continued.

"The second girl, Susan, would be a beauty anywhere else and has a most lovely voice. They are awfully jolly kids, we have great fun together. I have asked Lady Norah to give me their photographs.

"The littlest one, Daffy, is very plain and small, almost a dwarf, I should think. I was talking to Sylvia and Susan about Italy, when suddenly this little thing came up to me and asked me in a deep hoarse voice, 'Do you know where my father is?' Poor little mite! I told her about the villa and she told me to tell him, when I see him, that she wants to come where he is. It was rather pathetic.

"The people hereabouts take Lambe's desertion in very bad part. Lady Norah seems extremely nice, though rather dull, and is bringing the girls up beautifully. The two elder ones are the picture of health, but the mother told me that the little one is disposed to have asthma and the doctor has said that she ought to go to to a warm climate. She was to have gone abroad with Lady Corisande Peplow, but Peplow has

been sent to Petersburg on some mission. I believe he is to have a peerage.

"I shall be with you at the end of the month and very glad I shall be able to get back to the dear place.

"Remember me to Mr. Lambe, and give my love to Giannina.

"And, I am, dearest mother,

"Always, your most affectionate son,

"HUGHIE."

"There!" exclaimed Donna Mabel triumphantly, "do you see? It will be perfectly delightful. He is in love with her already and you like him, and you and I are great friends and he can buy Molinari's place and you can buy the olive grove between, and all you will have to do will be to build a bridge over the ravine and there you are!"

"Who's in love, and why should I buy Molinari's place?"

Donna Mabel struck at him playfully with the letter, with a Victorian kittenishness, quite out of date in these days of fine, manly women.

"Don't be silly; I mean Hughie, of course. It is quite easy to see that the boy is head over ears in love already and——"

"But with whom? With my wife, or my daughter? And with which one of my daughters, if you mean that? I have three."

"With Sylvia, of course. The thing to do is to get her over here at once, then they will be thrown

together, and before she has so much as seen any other young man we can have them safely married."

Lambe stared at her.

"But she's only a baby! She cannot be more than—let me see. Oh, well, I don't know how old she is, I should think not more than ten."

Donna Mabel made a gesture of despair.

"Nonsense! You have been away five years and a half; she must have been seven or eight then, if not more. You told me that the littlest one was having piano lessons, so *she* must have been four or five. And then there's Susan."

"Oh, yes, there's Susan," admitted Lambe guiltily.

"Well then, don't you see, this eldest one must be about fourteen. Livio's sisters both married before they were seventeen. Suppose you send a telegram and get them over at once. It would be very good for the asthma."

But Lambe did not want his daughters.

"It's the littlest one who has the asthma," he said, "and one of my sisters-in-law will take her somewhere. No, no, I won't have them here. Did I tell you," he said suddenly, "that the Kirklands are coming to lunch?"

Donna Mabel jumped down from her perch, stuffing the letter into her bag.

"Dio santissimo! No, you didn't. I'm off. I am sorry to seem rude, but you know I cannot stand those people. I don't see why you ask them here."

"Like 'em," said Lambe shortly. "So you won't stay?"

"No, thanks."

He accompanied her politely through the winding gallery to the library and across the hall to the front door.

"Thomas, Donna Mabel would like her pony carriage."

"Very good, sir."

A moment later as he returned from giving the order, Thomas approached his master.

"Beg pardon, sir, shall you be in to lunch?"

Lambe regarded him absently.

"Yes, but I shan't want any proper lunch. You may bring me some fruit in the Cascade Garden."

Donna Mabel whirled round on her high heels and fixed him with a reproachful eye.

"How like you to forget all about the Kirklands! That greedy old woman would have been pleased to find a lunch of fruit and nothing else."

"Bless me!" ejaculated Lambe. "*I am an idiot.*"

The pony carriage arriving at that moment caused a welcome diversion and the little lady drove away, promising, in comforting tones, to come back the next day.

Lambe turned back out of the sun into the cool, square hall. Thomas stood respectfully looking at him.

"Fruit in the pergola, sir. Any wine, sir?"

"Yes," said Lambe, "And, Thomas, I think in case anybody comes to-morrow, you had better say I have gone to Naples for the day. I am very tired, Thomas," he said plaintively.

Thomas Screach nodded.

"Very good, sir."

A model servant, this middle-aged man, with the abnormally long upper lip, and he was Christopher Lambe's only confidant. Long before Lambe left Lambe House, the good Screach had fully understood the silent misery of his master. No one knew better than Thomas the direful effect of Lady Norah on her husband. No one realized better than Thomas how the details of "bringing up" bored Lambe, how he hated the cold, and the wet, how he loathed going to church on Sunday morning, how the solemn dinner parties at his own or neighbor's houses depressed the poor little man, how the very word "nurse" exasperated him—in a word, how thoroughly out of place Christopher Lambe was in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call him.

Yet these things had never been verbally touched upon by either of the two men to the other. What Thomas Screach knew, he knew by intuition and observation, and there was within him a delicate soul that forbade his ever making a mistake by expressing, however subtly, his knowledge. But Lambe knew he knew, and loved him for his silence.

Screach, for his part, had never disliked Lady Norah, whom he regarded rightly as a "real lady," though dull. Donna Mabel he could not abide, and his faithful heart had for some time been haunted by the fear that Lambe might marry the former owner of his present home. There was always Lady Norah in



the background, but to Screech it seemed that if Donna Mabel wished to marry Lambe she would somehow or other manage to do so. Of late, however, this fear had, owing to unmistakable signs on Lambe's part of something nearly approaching dislike of the little lady, subsided, and the man's anxiety had changed into a malicious delight in helping his master's rigidly unexpressed wish to avoid his pertinacious friend as much as possible.

So Lambe went back to his unfinished newspaper to await the coming of the post, and Thomas looked forward with grim pleasure to the next day, when his should be the task of denying his master to Donna Mabel.

After a happy, idle day Lambe dined alone in his big dining room and then went for a smoke in the Pompeian garden beyond his breakfast place. Here in niches in the ancient wall lived mutilated stone ladies, each of whom had her name and history. At their feet was a flower bed now full of violets, and opposite to them, across a narrow gravel path, was a square tank full of water, on which floated rosy water lilies, now asleep. Nightingales sang in the cypress thicket between the tank and the sea, and on the cement path that was the end of the property that side and looked over the ravine, the bridge of which Donna Mabel had that morning suggested, Lambe walked up and down smoking.

Suddenly he was aware of some one coming toward him in the shadow of the cypresses, a tall, broad figure, vaguely familiar, vaguely unwelcome.

"Hallo, Kit, are you there?" cried a round, warm voice.

"My God, yes, I'm here, what is it?"

"It is me, Kit," returned the Bishop, emerging into the moonlight. "Don't be alarmed. Norah has broken her leg and cannot be moved for weeks, and none of the rest of the family seem to be able to get away, so *I* have brought Daphne."

"*Daphne!*" repeated Lambe stupidly, beginning to shake hands with his self-invited guest.

"Yes. I suppose you remember that you *have* a daughter named Daphne? Well, she's seedy and the doctors have ordered her out of England; she must have a warm climate and that sort of thing. She's in the house now."

But even as he spoke there came the sound of a splash and a little cry—Daffy had walked into the little pond. Christopher Lambe fished his last born out of the dark water and carried her back to the house. It was, he felt, the beginning of the end.

## CHAPTER X

**T**HUS came Daffy to Italy. The journey was hurried, and she being ill the most she remembered of it was the smell of the fur coat in which her uncle, the Bishop, had kept her wrapped. Hurried meals at buffets she recalled and once in the middle of the night when, owing to a flood, they had to change trains, she had for the first time in her life tasted the subtle joys of *café au lait*. The milk had boiled for hours and was full of shreds of cream and on its surface floated millions of little globules of grease. The coffee was most likely chiefly composed of chicory, but to Daphne it was nectar.

"Don't you like it, Uncle Tom?" she asked the stately gentleman who was personally conducting her to that most romantic, fabulous person, her father, as he set down his cup with a little grunt and a grimace.

The Bishop waved his hand benevolently.

"Drink it, my dear, it will do you good."

In the train into which they changed they were unable to be alone in their compartment. A lovely lady, wrapped in furs, sat in the corner opposite to the Bishop and occasionally smiled at the enraptured Daffy, who, far too shy to smile back, buried her face in the collar of Uncle Tom's coat, her big eyes staring out over it like those of some small furry animal. The

lady was dressed in dark green and her furs were like Daffy's mother's, only browner and shinier and much more abundant. She had a gold bag, on the edge of which sparkled little red and white stones that Daffy knew were rubies and diamonds, and she smelt most deliciously. Daffy decided that when she was grown she would take measures to ensure her smelling exactly the same.

Presently the child observed that her uncle was not at all easy in the presence of the lovely lady. He unfolded a huge newspaper and retired behind it, but Daffy, who was sitting next to him, could see that *he* was not reading. Imagine Uncle Tom reading without his glasses!

"Isn't she pretty?" whispered the child.

"Hush!" returned the Bishop, his upper lip pulled down to meet the lower one, which Daffy had always thought did not quite fit.

Night wore on, the light was very dim, the cushions very hard, the foot warmers were long since icy to the touch. Daffy began to think that even the excitement of sitting up all night did not compensate for the rest to small bodies conferred by beds. Besides, she was hungry again. This last fact was made known to her uncle and he, with obvious unwillingness, rose and opened his big, pigskin dressing-case, bringing from it a small packet of biscuits.

"I want a banana, please," said Daffy.

But the bananas were, as the Germans say, "all."

The biscuit was dry and turned to dust and ashes in the mouth. Daffy was nearly eleven, although she

looked about seven, so very genteelly tried to conceal the fact that she could not possibly swallow her little meal.

Suddenly the lovely lady leaned forward, a little tiny plate in her hand.

"May I not give you one of my sandwiches?" she said, with a pretty foreign accent, "and the chocolate is quite fresh."

"Thank you very much," returned the Bishop stiffly, "my little niece will do quite well with her biscuits. You like biscuits, do you not, Daffy?"

But Daffy's eyes were glued to the delicate, moist-looking sandwiches.

"Please, Uncle Tom, the biscuits are rather nasty."

"Very well, then, my dear, and thank you, madam."

Daffy helped herself shyly, and oh, that sandwich was good! It melted in her mouth and was made of she knew not what.

"Won't you have one of these, too?" went on the lady, obviously delighted with the little girl's pleasure.

Daffy hesitated. One of the two remaining sandwiches was like the one she had already had and the other was black and strange-looking, but hers was an adventurous spirit and she took the black one. Oh, woe! It was salt and strange and unspeakably horrid. She could not swallow it, its bulk seemed to double in her mouth. Her eyes filled with tears; manfully she tried to choke it down and the lady burst into pretty, tinkling laughter.

"Poor little thing! Here, put it in this piece of paper and throw it out of the window. Crachez

—how do you say it?—speet it out. Don't be afraid."

Daffy did so, and as she was wiping her eyes the lady went on.

"And now, Tom Pember, it is time you gave up trying not to recognize an old friend. 'Ow do you do?"

Uncle Tom, solemn, religious, imposing Uncle Tom, who was nearly as old as God, blushed. Daffy saw it with her own eyes.

"I am afraid—" he began stiffly.

But she laughed again. Daffy had never heard any one laugh in quite that way, it sounded like music; and then she went on in voluble French, of which Daffy understood only that her reverend relative was being called "my dear" by this strange lady.

"Ah, but yes," went on the lady in English, her eyes dancing as she turned to Daffy, "it is very strange, your dear Uncle and I are 'ole frien'—but *such* 'ole frien', ma p'tite. It is many, many years ago that we were at Barbizon together; your uncle then was very young and had much less fat than now. He was slim, ah! of a slimness. But as he had then less—'ow do you say?—flesh, so had he *then* more hair than now."

Uncle Tom was extremely angry; Daffy knew by the way his ears had turned purple, and he said something in French in a rather sharp voice. But this remark had no effect whatever on the French lady, who continued to laugh. Then he again opened his newspaper and continued his transparent pretense of reading it.

"Your dear uncle is ennuyé—annoyed," she declared, shaking her head solemnly. "It is dreadful, and once we were *such* great 'friends'. But in those days he was not a bishop, oh, no! he was—'ow you say?—a painter, a rather bad painter. Yes, he do not paint well, ce pauvre Tom. But it make nothing. He was young and gay and we all loved him very moch."

"That," observed Daffy solemnly, "was when he was a curate."

The lady burst out into her tinkling laugh.

"Ha, ha! No, he was not a curate. Tom, did you hear? Put down your silly paper and listen."

But Uncle Tom read on.

"You remember the pony race we had at the fair at Neuilly and the fortune teller who told you you were going to marry a girl with a grain de beauté under her right eye and yellow hair?"

"*You* have a grain de beauté under *your* right eye," remarked Daffy, munching chocolate.

Before the lady could answer Uncle Tom had thrown down his paper.

"Angèle!" he thundered.

The lady looked at him and smiled.

"Ah! You remember my name?" she said softly.

"It is a preety name, is it not, leetle one?"

"Does it mean Angel?" said Daffy.

The lady leaned across and put her hand on Daffy's knee.

"No, dear, not angel; it is jost a name. And now let me make you a leetle bed here on the seat. I will

lend you my pillow and cover you with my rug. You will allow it, Tom? 'Ow does one say—milor'?—and you will go to sleep."

There was something appealing in her eyes as she looked at the Bishop. He assented gravely. The lady's hands were very gentle. Her little crimson leather pillow was very soft and Daffy's little inner woman being comforted with foie gras and chocolate, warmth soon put her to sleep. She woke up once or twice as the train rattled through the darkness, only to stir slightly and drop off again. Once Uncle Tom was saying:

"I am very sorry, Angèle, very," and the lovely lady was blowing her nose softly. The next time they were both laughing and the lady was saying in French:

"Will you ever forget Suzette Langlois in the swing? Poor Suzette, to her dying day she believed those awful ankles of hers were pretty."

In the hurry of changing trains at Turin Daffy, who was very sleepy and very cold, held out her hand perfunctorily to the lady, who was going no farther.

"Good-bye," said the child shyly, "and thank you very much."

"Good-bye, my dear. Tom, may I kiss her?"

Uncle Tom hesitated. Then his face changed.

"Yes, Angèle."

Daffy had never seen him look at once so kind and so sad; it was as if he was very sorry for the lady named Angèle. The kiss was gentle and smelt good,



and then the little girl and her uncle got into the waiting train and Daffy found in her hand a little crooked bit of coral set in tiny seed pearls and gold.

"Oh, Uncle Tom, look," she said. "The lady, Angèle, put it into my hand. Do you think she meant to give it to me?"

The Bishop took the trifling thing and looked at it closely. He remembered it.

"Yes, my dear, I think she meant you to have it, and—it can do you no harm."

Then the train started.

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE remainder of the journey was to Daffy uneventful, and the next incident that remained in her memory was the arrival at Naples.

They had breakfast on a balcony looking out over the wonderful thing that was the sea and yet was so utterly different from the gray waters at home.

And after breakfast came a long rest, and then another short train journey distinguished only by the fact of Daffy's seeing for the first time in her life a man taking snuff. But the drive from Castellamare the child never forgot, as indeed only a dull-minded person could. The gradual unfolding of the view, the winding of the road, the riot of beauty on all sides, and above all the yellow drenching sun that poured down on the world and filled everything it touched save the sea, the blueness of which nothing could change.

The little girl sat primly with her hands folded on her navy blue lap, her thin face intense and almost grim with ecstasy.

As for the Bishop, he went to sleep presently and awoke greatly refreshed. He was conscious of great benevolence in bringing his niece on her long journey, and he knew that very few busy men would have been

so unselfish, but at the same time he was kind and really enjoyed the child's delight.

When Daffy had been sent to take a very necessary bath she was put to bed and at once fell asleep. When morning came they did not rouse her, she slept so soundly. After breakfast the Bishop and his brother-in-law took a walk and when they came in toward noon they sat in the library.

"A very long journey," the large man said, "and fatiguing."

"It is indeed." Lambe looked very depressed and peeled a peach as if it was an endless job.

"She is a good little thing, Daphne; doesn't talk much and is hungry only at regular intervals."

Lambe's eyes twinkled suddenly.

"Ah, yes; Norah would see to *that*. How is Norah, Tom?"

"Well—it's a compound fracture—doctors seem satisfied with her progress, but—a broken leg is a broken leg, and she won't be about again for a long time, poor thing."

"I see. I must write to her. And the little one, she is ill, you say? She doesn't look it."

"No. She has asthma and she had bronchitis at Christmas. Abdy said she must get away from the fog."

"Corisande was going to take her—somewhere, wasn't she?"

The Bishop fingered his cross.

"Yes, she has a villa at Cannes. They were going there and at the last minute something happened—I

believe she is going to Russia now. You know Corisande?"

"I do. Well, Tom, there's no good in my pretending that I am glad to have Daphne here, for I am not, but as it can't be helped, I'll do my best to amuse her."

"Don't *amuse* her, Christopher. I must tell you especially not to amuse her. You must get her a governess and she will be busy all day. She must never go out when it's damp, and you must impress the governess with the importance of seeing that her feet are always kept dry. She goes to bed at eight and gets up at seven."

"Oh!"

"She never eats sweets, of course. Her bath must be 60°—let me see—" The Bishop took a small note book from his pocket and opening it put on his glasses and continued: "Sixty degrees—yes—and you are to see that she drinks her milk *hot*. It appears that she dislikes milk and is inclined to make a fuss about drinking it. She must be watched in regard to her hat, as she has a way of going about bareheaded, which is bad for her. I think that's all, except that you are not to forget to give her a mutton chop or a bit of underdone beefsteak for her lunch every day—"

"Oh, my God!" said Christopher Lambe.

The Bishop stared, offended and annoyed, as his brother-in-law rose.

"What's the matter, Lambe?"

"Nothing. Or—everything. Look here, Tom, I am perfectly willing to do my best for the child, but I

won't do Norah's best. Do you see? Norah sent her here to me for me to look after and I'm going to do it in my own way. Tell Norah this, will you? Tear up your notes, they're no good to me. Now, it's lunch time. Come along and eat."

He led the way through a long, cool marble corridor into the dining room, and as Thomas was already at his post, no more was said.

They sat down and Lambe turned to Thomas.

"Miss Daphne has come," he said. "She is in the yellow room. Tell her that luncheon is ready."

Daphne, whose small face was thin and pointed, came in quite quietly and slid up into her great chair by some queer system of leg movement invented by herself. Then as Thomas set a plate of macaroni before her she smiled suddenly.

"Are there no chops?" she asked.

"No," said Lambe.

"Oh, dear, I'm so glad!"

The Bishop frowned, but Lambe laughed.

"The mutton here is very bad. I haven't seen a chop for months. Now, then, eat your macaroni. Here, have some cheese in it."

With a liberal hand he sprinkled grated Parmesan on the child's plate and then turned to his brother-in-law.

"Red or white wine, Tom?"

Daffy loved cheese, which she had never tasted before. And she loved the queer little dark fish fried in oil, and the sweet made of she knew not what, but which was covered with what she at first thought was

grated cheese, but which her father told her was cocoa-nut.

The Bishop, a mighty trencherman, was hungrier than usual after his long journey and his long sleep, and, after all, Daphne was Kit's daughter, not his. He had done his best. So he ate his strange luncheon with a relish and gave Lambe various items of family news as he did so. Otho's new baby was another girl, a very great disappointment. Otho had bought the Sandford farm, a rather dear purchase, but it rounded off the north end of the estate. Little Birdie Sarre was engaged to one of the Herefordshire Wilbrahams—a chap who left one arm in South Africa. Sarre himself was awfully in debt, borrowing from everybody.

"He hasn't borrowed from me," declared Lambe, building a tower of glasses, to Daffy's tremulous delight.

"No, he hates you."

Lambe looked up surprised.

"You mean to say he still resents my having married Norah?"

"*Hush!*" The Bishop's eyes traveled rapidly from Lambe to Daffy and back again, but Lambe took no notice whatsoever of his signal.

"That's extraordinary—after all these years. Poor old Bill!"

He was hopeless. Mentally the Bishop rehearsed the way in which he should explain Lambe's attitude. "He always behaves," he would say, "as if he and the person to whom he speaks were quite alone. He dis-

regards the presence of any one else. What he will make of Daphne, heaven only knows!" Here he was interrupted by the voice of the child, the making of whom was in such strange hands.

"Father, may I have another of those green things?"

The green things were pistachio sweets, and Lambe promptly gave her two.

After lunch the Bishop took a nap and at about six he left to go back to Naples.

"I am very busy just now," he said, half apologetically, half from an ungenerous wish to convey to the ungrateful Lambe how difficult it had been for a man of his importance to take such a long journey out of pure kindness of heart.

"I dare say. It was very good of you to bring her. Tell Norah I'll do my best for her. And—I hope Norah's arm—"

"Leg," corrected the Bishop.

"Leg—will soon get all right. Good-bye, Tom. Many thanks."

But his thanks were obviously those of pure perfunctoriness. When the carriage had rolled away among the great palm trees to the lodge gates Lambe and Daffy went down the stone steps to the little beach.

"Wouldn't you like to paddle?"

"Oh, father—I don't think mother'd like it," she answered, her eyes shining.

He sat down on the side of a disabled fishing boat and he stood her between his knees.

“Now, look here, Tiny Tim,” he said seriously, “I must talk to you. When you are in England it is quite right that you should obey your mother. You’d be a little beast if you didn’t, and besides—she’d punish you. But now you are in Italy, and with *me*. Your mother is very good. Much more good than I am in every way. But she isn’t here, and as little girls have to obey some one, it’s me you’ll obey here. It won’t hurt you to paddle in this warm water. It won’t hurt you to eat Italian food, and so you are to eat it. You are not to have a governess for the present, and as I don’t know how to teach you, you’ll have to do without lessons. Mrs. Screach will help you dress and so on. The rest of the time you can do what you like—unless I tell you not to. Do you understand?”

Daffy, very naturally, did not understand, but the vista of unholy joys thus opened to her was too enchanting for words. So she said nothing, answering only by a smile.

Lambe smiled back. Then he touched the brown mole on her cheek with one finger.

“Now, then, off with your shoes and stockings. I’ll sit here.”

While she played at the edge of the sea he smoked and presently sauntered away back to the house by way of the Cascade Garden.

Then realizing the distance that lay between her and that arbiter of fate, she gathered up her shoes and stockings and sped barefoot up the stone steps.



## CHAPTER XII

**T**HE next few weeks passed uneventfully to outward seeming, but they were of the greatest importance to Daphne Lambe. The sudden change from a life of the narrowest and most incessant supervision to one of almost absolute freedom was in itself memorable enough to a child, but to her the greatest charm of the wonder-worked situation was—her father. She had been nearly a baby when he left home; now she was nearly eleven and an exceptionally observant small person whose solemn dark eyes saw much more than most grown people's.

And Lambe interested his daughter as much as her mother had bored her.

The little man's innocence of fixed hours, his disregard of "must," were a source of the most fascinated surprise to the child.

"Lunch? Oh, any time from twelve to two. Depends, you see, on what I'm doing. Dinner—well, yes, you must have your dinner at a Christian hour, I suppose. I am told that children's insides must be considered. You may dine at seven always, and I'll dine with you sometimes. Do you like roast, kid?"

Then there was the all-important question of bedtime.

"Sleepy?" he asked her the first evening about eight.

No, Daffy was not sleepy.

"Well, the bed is there, you know. You may go whenever you care to. Mrs. Screach will put you to bed."

"I can put myself to bed," returned Daffy with dignity. "Mother says every child of six should be able to undress and at eight every child should be able to dress—all except washing, and that's on account of the ears."

"Dear me," murmured Lambe.

"Yes, I can't do my ears yet, but Sylvia and Susan can."

This piece of domestic intelligence left Christopher Lambe quite cold.

Mrs. Screach, a full-bosomed, highly colored Italian peasant, taken to wife by the impressionable Screach a year before, was the proud possessor of a small Screach of six months. Angiolino was a nice baby and to him Daffy at once became deeply attached. This attachment in its turn drew Aurora to her new charge, and Daffy was well looked after by the light moraled Italian woman, whose touch would have been regarded by Lady Norah as contamination.

Aurora was the owner of a very soft and pretty contralto voice, and every evening when Daffy was in bed (the tiny Angiolino being tucked away in his bed in the servants' quarters) the pretty woman sang the songs of the countryside to her master's little daughter. Daffy's voice was the voice of a crow, but she had a quick memory, and in a short time was herself

singing in the Sorrento dialect as she roamed about the garden.

Her aptitude was vast and it amused Lambe to see her serious application to her food.

One day Donna Mabel Acquadolce came in while Lambe and Daffy were at lunch.

"A little daughter? And you never let me know?"

Donna Mabel's faded eyes rolled reproachfully at Lambe.

"Why should I?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You surely knew I'd take an interest?"

Poor Lambe was a very impolite man sometimes through a lack in him of a certain quality hard to define—the quality of seeing the other side. But even he could hardly express to his well-meaning neighbor his inward groan and ejaculation of "Take an interest! Good Lord, if only you *didn't*!" So he said nothing.

Donna Mabel then proceeded to that awful task of making herself agreeable to the little girl.

Daffy regarded her solemnly, answering her questions with civility, but volunteering, Lambe observed with a spasm of unjustifiable pleasure, not one word of unnecessary information.

"And how you must long for your dear little sisters," Donna Mabel said at last.

Daffy, who was eating a banana, shook her head.

"No, I don't," she declared.

"Don't wish your sisters were here?"

"No." The banana was good, but there was an-

other in the dish before her and Daffy was afraid that Donna Mabel might take it, so she was in a hurry and spoke curtly.

"But why? Surely you love them?"

Daffy bolted the last bit of banana number one and helped herself to banana number two before she answered. Then she said:

"Y-yes—I suppose I love them."

Donna Mabel was honestly shocked. 'A real red crept under her paint, turning it a slightly bluish hue.

"My dear, what a naughty little girl you must be!"

"I ain't a naughty little girl," retorted Daffy stolidly, busy with her banana.

"But—"

"Donna Mabel," interrupted Lambe in Italian, "please don't tease her."

"I am not teasing her. It—it interests me. I can't understand it at all. And such a good mother, too."

"Bad father, remember," he murmured. But he sent Daffy from the room and then laid down to his injured guest the law that was to govern her future intercourse with his daughter.

"Queer? Of course she's queer, thank God. The other two are commonplace enough, judging by what my brother-in-law said about 'em. They will be ironed out as smooth as linen collars—all the interesting little creases in their minds starched and smoothed away. Let this one alone. I—I am beginning to like her and I'm not going to have her spoiled."

Donna Mabel drove home in one of her ineffectual

little rages that invariably died away within an hour or so. She loved new people and adored what she called taking an interest in people.

Daphne Lambe was only a rather ugly, very badly dressed child of eleven, but she was new to her, and being Christopher Lambe's daughter lent an added charm to her. Donna Mabel would have loved to "mother" Daffy. But it was not to be. Daffy was to be let alone.

And through a series of unforeseeable circumstances the letting alone system was allowed to flourish for several months.

When June came and the child was to be taken home, Susan suddenly developed measles, and as both Lady Norah and Sylvia caught the disease from her, Lambe was informed by wire that Daphne was to stay on with him.

To his surprise, his dominant feeling was one of satisfaction. Daffy was a pleasant person in one's house. She was never in the way, never at a loss for an occupation or amusement, and her look of improved health pleased and flattered her father.

"You are glad you are to stay?" he asked, on the receipt of the wire.

"Oh, *father!*" She said no more, but it was enough. Then came the journey to Paris.

It came over Lambe one very warm June evening as he smoked on the terrace. Paris! He had not been there for a year and a half, and on such a night as this Paris would be at its—or *her*—best. He closed his eyes for a moment and different aspects of the

Ville Coquette passed through his mind in a visionary pageant.

Yes, he must go. After Paris he would go somewhere in the mountains to get a thorough cooling down. "St. Augustin; or—yes, St. Augustin, by Jove, and I'll eat their Louvois cream cheese and go to sleep to the music of the waterfall!"

He threw his cigarette over the parapet and walked quickly to the house.

"Thomas, pack up. We are going to Paris to-morrow."

Thomas bowed and went away to make his arrangements. Presently he came back.

"Beg pardon, sir, but the wife says you can't possibly go to-morrow," he said.

Lambe looked up from his book.

"Can't go? Your wife says I can't go? What on earth—"

"Because Miss Daphne 'asn't no clothes that would do, sir," he returned, "and they couldn't be got no-how before Tuesday or Wednesday."

Lambe sank into the chair from which he had risen in his amazement.

"Oh, yes, Miss Daphne," he said faintly. "Does—does Mrs. Screach think I must take her with me, Thomas?"

Thomas Screach was a big, heavily built man with a stupid, honest face. Now he looked at his master as if he, Lambe, were an irresponsible child.

"In course she does, sir."

So Daffy went to Paris. Not, however, before

Lambe asked her if she would not prefer to stay up on the hill with Donna Mabel.

"No, father, I'll come with you, please," she answered. "I don't like Donna Mabel."

The clothes problem was solved very simply. They would do the necessary shopping in Paris. This they did and it may be remarked that they both thoroughly enjoyed it.

They put up at a cheerful white and gold hotel in the Champs Elysées, they lunched wherever they happened to be when hunger attacked them, and Daffy was shown the Venus, the Eiffel Tower, the Conciergerie, Nôtre Dame, and the Jardin des Plantes. When she was in bed Lambe went to the plays he loved or for long, aimless, delightful walks through the vivid streets.

Lady Rayburnham, Daffy's eldest Pember aunt, wrote home about this time to her sister:

"I had a most amusing rencontre yesterday in the rue de la Paix. I was coming out of Worth's when I heard my name bellowed very loud, and turning, I saw a little man in white flannel clothes of weird cut and a shabby Panama hat. With him a thin-legged monkey of a child in a preposterously short white embroidered frock (the skirt like a ballet skirt), a huge hat made of stiff white frills, a blue sash and blue shoes and socks. Its arms were bare but for short blue mitts and it carried a ridiculous scrap of a blue sunshade.

"I didn't know them from the dead, for I hadn't seen him for ten years and her for four, but you will

guess who they were. They seemed very glad to see me and insisted on taking me to a café for tea. He looks well, and in spite of his many wrinkles (far more than Dick has, in spite of our six years in India!) he looks very boyish, as if he had changed his skin for a red man's, more than anything else. Daphne, poor little figure of fun, chattered away to him as if he were her brother. They had bought the clothes at one of the big shops the day before and were *very* pleased with them.

"They are going on into the Vosges to-morrow. I wish you could have her back, my dear Norah, for while I am sure poor Christopher means well, he is certainly spoiling the child and rendering her quite unfit for Lambe House. . . ."

Lady Norah telegraphed the day she received this letter, but Lambe, with a chuckle, crumpled the blue paper into his pocket and left it unanswered. It amused him to have his wife wish for Daffy. He liked the child and they enjoyed each other's society in a way he would have thought impossible a few weeks ago.

They went to St. Augustin, a scrap of a village, set in an enclosed, green valley not far from La Schlucht, and stayed there for a month. Then, on their return to Paris he found letters which forced him to hand the child over to Lady Corisande Peplow, who was on her way home from Russia and who had arranged with her sister to conduct her charge to the very doors of Lambe House.



## CHAPTER XIII

**T**HE change was very marked to the child. She had been in warm, sunny places with a merry little madman for her companion, and her own wishes her only rules in life.

She came back into a cold, wet August, into an iron-ruled household, into the unsympathetic atmosphere of her two sisters.

There is a suggestion of the Cinderella situation in the foregoing sentence that must be at once explained away.

Daffy Lambe was not of the stuff of which Cinderellas are made.

Her father had spoiled her and given her a quite new and most delightful sense of her own importance in the scheme of things.

She had learned to talk, to express her thoughts, and her tongue, when she was angry, was fluent and viperish.

Susan, who enjoyed baiting her, found to her surprise that "the little brown one," as Daffy was known by the fisherfolk, was no longer an enemy to be underrated.

Battles were frequent and Susan on one occasion went to the length of weeping under some onslaught of her junior.

Lady Norah was deeply distressed. To her mind there was something vulgar in the idea of sisters quarreling. In her own family life the brothers had bullied the sisters in a polite British way, but the girls had consistently held together in a band against the boys. And here was Daffy, spoiled by her Italian experiences, making Susan cry!

Susan possessed the gift of being as disagreeable as she chose to one person, and at the same time maintaining her innocence in the eyes of all but her victim. Lady Norah never to the end of her life saw *why* Daffy became so furious with her sister; but it was evident to the meanest comprehension when Daffy meant to be nasty. The child's eyes held on these occasions a positive blaze of light and her too short upper lip lifted in the middle, showing a glint of white teeth.

"Daphne, you are being very naughty indeed," was poor Lady Norah's constant cry, and to it Daffy gave no answer whatever.

For about a month the battle raged continuously, and at the end of that time Susan retired, worsted, from open conflict and a kind of armed peace reigned.

It was now September, and a golden and blue one, such as is but seldom vouchsafed to our gray shores. It is as if beaming, sunny days came to us from across the sea, only to retire, frightened by the dull clouds and heavy atmosphere presented to them.

Lambe House was at its best that year and the children were down by the sea for hours every day. The neuralgic Ruggles had some time since been super-

sed by what was known in the household as "a frau-lein." It is to be supposed that the four-cornered Teutonic lady with the porous nose had a surname, and Lady Norah must have known it, but on entering Lambe House the surname was lost and its owner became once and for all "Frawline." She did not mind. She was a good soul and minded nothing, apparently. Lady Norah believed her state of acceptance to mean perfect bliss, reasoning, "poor soul, she has certainly never before been comfortable," and Lady Norah was very kind to the alien.

But if Frawline's mind could have been read what would have been Lady Norah's amazement to find that the governess's quiescence was that of any white man's while in lucrative captivity among some negro tribe in Africa.

"Ach!" she wrote to her Verlobter, a Königlich Württemberg'sche Postbeamter, "I get sometimes so hungry for some really good food, my heart belovèd. For some of your mother's potato dumplings and some herring, what would I not give! They are very kind to me. The lady is pleasant, but it is not gemüthlich, and they live in a draught. What the winter will be with no stoves the dear heaven only knows. The children are beautiful as angels (two of them), but their clothes are not at all praktisch and to my taste very ugly, but then English people cannot be expected to have good taste."

Frawline taught the children German, French, geography, arithmetic, history and music. She was an excellent teacher and the children liked her. Sylvia,

who was fundamentally stupid, learned her little lessons with ease, Susan exactly what was strictly necessary, and Daffy, but for languages, presented to the onslaught of education an impenetrable and impregnable front. She learned during that year absolutely nothing. It was not wilfulness nor stupidity, it was a kind of temporary paralysis of the acquiring nerve.

"I *do* try," she told her mother, "only I don't seem to be able to hear. To *listen*, I mean."

Frawline was patience itself, for was she not earning the wherewithal to build for herself and the bow-legged idol of her life a nest in delightful and highly civilized Würtemberg? She was patient and kind, but occasionally she called Daffy *dumm*, and this word was cherished by Susan.

In the matter of music things went better for Daffy. Her long, thin, brown hands were possessed of an extraordinary agility; they flew over the keys in unstumbling haste that delighted her instructor, and while Susan, who was really musical, was still struggling with the simplest melodies, Daffy soared far above her in selections from Schumann and even Chopin, to say nothing of some obscure masters. The fact that Daffy was utterly unmusical never occurred to any of the household; she could play, and that was enough.

Poor Susan, blundering up the thorny path, adored the music she could not make and when quite alone "she could pick out things by ear" quite remarkably.

Sylvia's piano lessons had been given up as hopeless after a few months' practice, owing to the fact

that she literally could not tell one tune from another. At this time the Lambe girls were respectively fifteen, thirteen and eleven.

Sylvia was tall, and, as it were, beautiful through her fat, for too fat she was. Her wonderful hair was now plaited, but it curled above her brow and hung in a thick cable to her hips. Her little nose would have been a joy to any sculptor, whereas her coloring, in spite of an almost constantly out-of-door life, was as delicate as the inside of a beautiful shell. Her beauty was too great to be ignored even by herself, but it was luckily too great to be a source of vanity to her. Even at that time her faults were almost entirely negative, whereas Daffy's were like her virtues, when these latter began to develop, distinctly positive.

Alas, that year when she was eleven Daffy's virtues were invisible to the naked eye of outside observation, whereas her faults loomed large. She lied, she stole, her temper was furious and rousable by the slightest word.

The story of the necklet will illustrate what life in the schoolroom was at that time at Lambe House.

Just before Christmas Hughie Gunning came down for a few days and brought each of the girls a necklet. Daffy's was of green-blue iridescent shells from the South Sea, an exquisite trifle that looked like moonlight and fire and deep sea waters.

Susan's was of coral, smoothly polished beads of a deep pink, and Sylvia's was a little twisted coil of tiny seed pearls with an enchanting tassel at the clasp.

None of the children had the slightest idea of the relative value of the gifts; to them the shells might have been more precious than the pearls. The trouble came, as usual, through Susan.

One mild afternoon a few days after Christmas they went for a long walk over the downs toward Rottingdean. Frawline, puffing along behind them, contented herself with keeping them in sight, so their talk was unrestrained.

"I wish Hughie hadn't had to go," remarked Daffy, gazing at the sea, "he is so nice."

"I suppose his mother wanted him." Sylvia's observations were never brilliant.

"Yes. But I don't see why he had to go so soon. Donna Mabel would have forgotten she wanted him if he had waited. I know her!"

Susan laughed. "You needn't remind us that you have been to Italy," she answered, "we know that quite well, thanks."

"I wasn't reminding you—"

"Don't squabble, girls," put in Sylvia, yawning.

"Susan's so disagreeable," growled Daffy in the absurd deep note that came to her voice when she was moved.

Susan, who was bored by the walk, laughed.

"Oh, yes, Susan the wicked is always to blame, isn't she? And the angelic Daffy—"

"Shut up, girls." Sylvia yawned again, showing every one of her wonderful teeth that to this day are untouched by a dentist's hands.

"All right, dear. Come along, Syl, let's walk on

ahead and let Daffy come with Frawline. I have something to tell you."

Daffy made a hideous face at her immediate senior.

"Sylvia's my sister as well as yours, Susan Lambe," she cried, "and you *are* disagreeable. Hughie was awfully cross with you the other day for being nasty to me. He called you a little beast, and you know it."

"He was joking."

"He wasn't. And anyhow—"

Susan's bow-shaped mouth stretched into a perfect smile.

"Anyhow, your beloved Hughie likes me better than he likes you."

"He *doesn't*," roared Daffy, now thoroughly roused.

"Then why did he give me a nicer necklace than yours?" leered Susan.

"Pooh! Corals aren't *half* so nice as my lovely little shells. Peasant girls wear them in Italy—"

Susan stood still in the path and assumed her most grown-up air.

"Listen to this, Daphne," she said, "this very morning I heard nurse tell Frawline that those shells cost four-and-six in her own brother's shop at Bexhill. So there!"

Now Daffy, with all her faults, was not sordid. The actual fact that her necklet was less valuable than Susan's meant nothing to her, but she loved Hughie Gunning and she was bitterly jealous of his affection for Susan. It was, even then, an understood thing that he loved Sylvia the best of the three, but Daffy

had believed herself to be his second favorite, as indeed she was.

This story of Susan's, however, convinced her that even Susan was preferred to her by the young man. It was as if the sky had darkened.

Then the elder girls walked on with linked arms and Daffy followed in unbroken silence.

That night when the whole household slept a small white figure crept from her bed to Susan's little dressing-table and extracted from the silver box where Susan kept her treasures the coral necklet. Then, wrapped in her ugly brown flannel dressing-gown, Daffy went downstairs and out into the foggy darkness. Going to the tree where the cache was, she with some difficulty, hampered by her long garments and knitted slippers, dropped the corals into the hollow.

The next day, when accused by the frantic Susan as the probable author of her loss, the child denied so obstinately any knowledge of the necklet that Lady Norah perforce believed her.

"It is very strange," she added, still a little doubtful.

"Lots of things are strange," returned Daffy, the wisdom of which remark there was no gainsaying.

But Susan knew and did not forget.

Poor Daffy, she was so utterly wicked and unprincipled in spite of all the religious instruction conscientiously doled out to her by her mother, it is a wonder that any good thing could exist in such a little mass of sinfulness. And yet she was warm-hearted, loving violently those few people whom she loved at



all, and she would have gone to the stake for either her father, Hughie Gunning or little Angiolino Screach, the three creatures in the whole world who, she believed, loved her.

Gunning still has the letter she wrote him a day or two after the episode of the necklet:

“DEAR HUGHIE:

“You do love me more than Susan, don’t you? She says you love her most, so I’ve done an appalling thing. I stole her necklet you gave her and hid it in my cache. She shall never, never see it again. I have lied and lied and said I didn’t take it, but I did, and so I am a felon. If you tell I shall be flayed alive, but I don’t care, I had to tell you.

“Oh, Hughie darling, I want to go back to Italy. I loathe England and Susan, and I want to see my father, who has forgotten all about me. I was never so devilish with him; it is being here that corrupts your loving

DAFFY.”

## CHAPTER XIV

**L**AMBE never wrote to his wife or to Daffy, but he had not forgotten the child, as she thought.

On the contrary, he missed her, greatly to his own surprise, and would have sent for her to come out to him had he not feared that his so doing might again open a discussion about his taking to his unwilling bosom his whole family.

So he let things drift and made no sign, and by the time April came Daffy was convinced that he would never again think of her unless he was violently forced to it.

Hughie Gunning had not been to England; he had gone to see his mother, but had left before Daffy's letter arrived, and that tragic epistle found him in Constantinople.

He dared not answer it confidentially, but wrote a friendly note to her, hoping she was well and happy and adding, "I trust, dear old Daffums, that for the sake of us who love you you are trying to get the better of that nasty temper of yours."

Daffy, such is the ingratitude of women, did not like this letter and mentally stigmatized its writer as a prig.

To her great disgust, her health continued all

through the winter to be very good; she could not muster up the ghost of a cough or a solitary attack of the blessed asthma that the foregoing year had procured for her the joys of foreign travel.

On her twelfth birthday she began a diary with the words, "I, Daphne Lambe, being of sound mind," and in that same first entry she declared her disbelief in a personal God of any kind, that she loved her mother, but did not like to be with her, that she liked her sister Sylvia sometimes, and that she at all times hated her sister Susan.

A horrid document this. Its entries, though fairly regular, were non-exciting in nature until that of the evening of the nineteenth of October, which day had been celebrated by festivities in honor of Sylvia's sixteenth birthday.

Daffy had by this time acquired a literary fluency astonishing in one of her conversational curtness, and the description of the birthday may speak for itself. There is no excuse for the spelling, for if asked to spell any word she could do so correctly, but the diary was full of faults:

" . . . . I went downstairs early because Hughie was coming in time for breakfast. I went to the greenhouse and cut about forty malmaisons and put them in vases in his room. Mother scolded me, but it didn't matter. Mother gave Sylvia: ivory things for her dressing-table, a lovely blue frock without any collar and with short sleeves. Susan gave her a dozen real tortoise shell hair pins and a beautiful lace collar and cuffs. I gave her my red ring because I lost my purse

the other day and hadn't any money and mother said I might. Sylvia had on her new coat and skirt. It is to her ankles. She had on white silk shirt and a blue tie with a little gold fox head pin that Uncle Tom sent her. Her hair is up, only it keeps falling down. It is plaited and twisted up in a lump on her neck. She is a dream of beauty, as exquisite as a flower. We had late breakfast and in the middle of it in came Hughie. He had a big box full of orchids for Sylvia and a little gray leather box which he kept by his plate.

"I could see at once that he was excited about it. He kissed me and I was awfully pleased *at first*.

"After breakfast he and mother went into the green drawing-room. I tried to hear what they were talking about, but couldn't. The door is very thick.

"At last they came out and mother looked very much agitated—for her.

"Hughie then approached Sylvia.

"*'Sylvia,'* he said (and his voice gave a little squiggle). *'I have a little present for you.'* Then he opened the box and there was a row of little pearls, not seed ones but real, proper pearls, grown-up ones. They are too adorable for words.

"Sylvia was much pleased, but she didn't kiss him or scream. He clasped them round her neck. I am only twelve and small for my age, but at that moment I realized that it was *love*. Imagine Hughie being in love with Sylvia! They will have very handsome children.

"This afternoon the Vicar and Mrs. Dabney called, and Sylvia being grown up had to see them. So I took Hughie for a walk.

"First he scolded me for being savage and for telling lies. (He says it is ungentlemanly) and then I said to him, 'Hughie, my dear, I know your secret.'

"He really jumped with surprise and I was awfully pleased. 'I mean that I know you love my sister Sylvia.'

" 'I love all of you, when you are good,' he answered, very red, but I only shook my head.

" 'You don't want to marry us all, do you?'

"He sank down on a garden seat just like Guy in 'Barbara's Fate,' and I took his hand in mine.

" 'Do not fear to hurt me,' I went on soothingly, 'I am your friend.'

" 'You are a silly little goose,' he said rather crossly, 'and you have been reading some rubbishy novel. Cut along and don't bother me.'

"But I didn't cut along. Instead I said gently:

" 'Sylvia is too young to marry yet.'

"There was a long pause and I went on, 'Besides, she isn't at all grown-up inside. She never thinks the way I do.'

" 'Then perhaps I'd better marry you instead,' he retorted with a laugh. So I was angry and walked away with my head held high.

"Aunt Corry and Uncle Fred came over to dinner and after dinner I was in the library reading. Suddenly I heard mother say, 'You must promise me,

Hugh, to say nothing for two years. She is only a child.'

"Hughie gave a sort of groan.

"'All right, I'll try, Lady Norah, only I'm bound to give myself away. I—I'm an awful ass. Even little Daffy saw to-day.'

"I sat quite still behind the big sofa by the fire. Mother said a few unimportant things and then Hughie promised her solemnly and she went out.

"The names he called me because I hadn't got up and screamed that I was there weren't very gentlemanly, and I called him a pig, but we became friends again and he said after all he wasn't sorry I knew and asked me to write and tell him about her. He is *very* silly about her, and I never before realized how blind love really is. Now I know.

"Susan sang for Uncle Fred and her voice *is* lovely. She looked pretty, too. Sylvia sat in a big chair and went to sleep as usual.

"Aunt Corisande said my frock was awful and I was glad, for it is. She called me Cinderella. She is very kind, but her face is all plastered with white stuff that rolls up in the wrinkles. It is not pretty at all.

"Well, the eventful day is over.

"Hughie went at ten and is not coming back till summer, because mother won't let him. He is going to Sorrento and is going to give my love to father.

"Sylvia is now sixteen and has a lover, though she doesn't know it. Susan is fourteen and wears stays. I am twelve and plain, but I am the most intellectual. Tempus fugit and chi vivrà verrà, as Italians say."

## CHAPTER XV

**N**O one ever knew quite how Christopher Lambe finally settled matters with his wife. Quite suddenly, just after Sylvia's sixteenth birthday as chronicled by Daffy, Daffy again went to Sorrento and did not return until the following May.

Lady Norah never left England again, but apparently the arrangement satisfied her perfectly.

As a matter of fact the arrangement came about in a quite simple give-and-take way.

Dunstan Pember, the youngest of Lady Norah's brothers, a good-looking giver of suppers to musical comedy ladies, managed a short time after Daffy's return to England, after her visit to Italy, to involve himself seriously with one Miss Olive St. John of the Gaiety. This young lady, a really very pretty girl named Slamm, was wise in her generation and a positive dragon of virtue.

Mrs. Slamm, unfortunately doing time for some minor offense, was replaced by a highly presentable stage-mother, who chaperoned her "daughter" with the vigilance of half a dozen society parents rolled into one.

And poor Dunny Pember of course fell into the trap! He bought diamonds "on tick" which the young

lady would not accept, but which after much persuasion she at last consented to wear just to please him. He presented Mrs. St. John (who once in a moment of after-supper expansiveness confided to him that her husband had been a Major in the navy) with a very pleasing little motor, in which The Divinity took her ease. They lunched and supped at the Savoy and bills grew up like wild dragons' teeth.

At length, bothered to death by urgent creditors, unable to obtain another shilling from Jew or Christian, haunted by an awful fear of losing his bliss as a matrimonially bent Viscount had (so Mrs. St. John told him) appeared on the immediate scene, the boy asked the young woman to become an Honorable Mrs. Pember.

After a week of reflection, during which he nearly went mad from uncertainty, she deigned to accept him, and he, trusting to Pemberley's good nature, went to his eldest brother and confessed. Whereupon Pemberley used language and swore that he'd be ——d before he'd accept a ——d —— for a sister-in-law. He would not pay a single penny of a single bill incurred in the wooing of the said —— and his —— young —— of a brother had better waste no more breath in trying to persuade him.

"I'll have to go bust then, Otho," returned the boy, "you won't like that."

"I'll like anything rather than have a low down hussy for my sister-in-law. Our family has hitherto kept clear of the music hall comedy style of wife and I won't have you marrying this —— person."



"She's a damn sight better than lots of girls of one's own class."

But Pemberley had an unexpected fund of class-feeling and his red nose glowed with ardor.

"That doesn't matter, my boy. Any one who isn't a born idiot realizes that there are good women everywhere, even half-naked ones in choruses that can't sing. And God knows our own women aren't all angels. But they *are* our own women. That's just the point. If you must marry some one who isn't fit to be the mother of your children get one of your own class and go to H—— like a gentleman."

Dunstan couldn't persist and left the room at once. He was annoyed by his brother's attitude, amazed as well as indignant. Pember was a queer old bird.

But Pember was close-fisted as well as proud, and his resolution not to help his brother pay his debts lived out against two piteous appeals made by letters.

Then Dunny, as was his way, went to Corisande Peplow. She had no money herself, but she had a certain useful wisdom and on this occasion his trust in it was fully justified.

"Ask Kit Lambe," she said promptly, lighting a cigarette. "He has pots and is a good-natured old thing."

Lady Corisande never remembered her own age and spoke thus of Lambe in perfect good faith, quite forgetting that she was twelve years older than he.

So Dunstan Pember wrote to Lambe, who was then in Paris.

The answer came by cable:

*Will see you in London to-morrow Wednesday at eight at Bagg's in Albemarle Street.*

Dunny had not seen his eccentric brother-in-law for a long time, and the minute he came into the room the young man was aware of a kind of suppressed excitement in his manner.

"How d'ye do, Dunny?" Lambe said, "what's all this about a girl?"

"I—I love her," returned the youth sulkily.

"I see. Well, love her. It won't hurt you. Only you mustn't marry her. That won't do, you know."

"You are suggesting——"

"Hold your tongue and don't be an ass. I am not suggesting anything except that you don't tie yourself up for life to a half-educated product of the slums."

They dined, the two men, and only when they were comfortably full of food, did they return to the subject.

"I am rich, you know, Dunny. In fact, I am now, thanks to a kindly tip about copper from a gum-chewing individual from Ohio, a very rich man. Suppose I bribe you."

Then he made bids. Dunny was in love with Miss Slamm, but he had been impressed by Lord Pemberley's attitude toward the lady, and for a long time he had been tormented to death by his creditors. Gone were the peaceful nights of yore, gone the careless days. The boy was only twenty-two, and, after all, constant association with Miss Slamm had revealed to

him one or two harmless vulgarities of thought and phrase that startled him.

"I'm not such a cur as to be bought off," he protested. "Haymon wants to marry her—if she's good enough for him——"

"Haymon? I don't believe he wants to marry her," Lambe returned. He knew Haymon.

"Well, he *does*."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No. Mrs.—Mrs. St. John told me."

"Oh, Mrs. St. John. A relative of the lady, I suppose. Good name," he pursued, reflecting. Young Pember writhed. "Her real name, of course?"

"No," the boy burst out. "Her real name is Slamm, if you must have it, and I don't care a damn."

They talked for another hour and then Christopher Lambe went to bed.

The next morning, Lady Norah in answer to a wire from him appeared at his hotel, and after a short conversation, they parted with something almost like cordiality.

Results: Young Pember's bills were paid and his passage round the world, together with that of a cousin, a youth very little older but much wiser in his day and generation than he. Miss St. John was found to be easily satisfied. She accepted a fat cheque, she kept the jewels and the motor, and confessed to Mr. Lambe that poor old Dun had always rather bored her.

Bribery and corruption on all sides, a very discreditable arrangement, and Christopher Lambe should no doubt have been ashamed of himself. However, he

was neither ashamed nor compunctious, and Lady Norah for her part after in vain opposing her will to his, and after having been startled by his extraordinary attitude into saying one or two very unpleasant things to him, gave into his terms which were simply these: That in return for his saving the family from an undesirable sister-in-law and from a bankruptcy case, Daffy was to be allowed to spend six months out of every year with her father. "I can't understand your wanting her," Lady Norah pleaded, "if you liked her why did you leave her?"

"I know; I am perfectly illogical. But the fact remains that I *do* like her and as I have a perfectly desirable home for her, I wish to have her with me every winter. You have the other two, and from what young Gunning tells me, they are both of 'em far more attractive than the little one."

"Yes, they are. But I greatly prefer not to separate them."

However, he had from the first made it clear that he was willing to come to the family rescue in the matter of Miss Slamm on purely selfish grounds and on no others. He did not, he said, care a blow about young Dunstan and his debts, and nothing but his sensing a possible arrangement about Daffy had led him to make any move in the matter.

So Lady Norah gave in, and it may have been with a little sigh of relief that she said good-bye to her youngest daughter a fortnight later.

Daffy was not a comfortable inmate of Lambe House. She was too absolutely unlike the Pembers

for Lady Norah ever to understand her, and if she was to prove a failure it would be some small comfort to her mother that her bringing-up should not exclusively have been her doing.

But poor Lady Norah at the same time loved her daughter, and many were the words of advice given to her these last days.

"You will try to be so good, Daffy, won't you?" she said at the door of the first-class compartment at Victoria.

"I am always good with father," was the disconcerting reply.

Then as the train started, the girl leaned out.

"Oh, mother," she called. "I *do* love you, you know. And I *will* try to be good. Good-bye!"

Lady Corisande, one of whose constant little "flings in Paris" had occasioned the choosing of that particular day for Daffy's departure, watched her niece curiously during the journey to Calais.

"I wonder what will become of you, Daffy," she said. "Christopher will spoil you, of course, and you haven't the looks to bear spoiling. If it was Sylvia now, she would be allowed any amount of eccentricity, or even worse, she is so lovely."

"I may improve," suggested Daffy with a view of consoling her aunt rather than from any personal feeling. "Some girls do."

Lady Corisande burst out laughing, an indulgence that did dire things to her complexion.

"Like the Ugly Duckling, eh? Well, you certainly ain't dull, my dear, and that is something. Still you

ought to go in for something, if it's only golf. Do you like sports?"

Daffy made a face. "No, I loathe 'em. I don't mind tennis, but I don't really love it like the Vicarage girls. Swimming is the best of all."

Lady Corisande brightened. "Well, you can join the Bath Club and swim there, your figure won't be bad, though your legs are too long."

Daffy's personal appearance and lack of accomplishments gave Daffy herself no uneasiness at all. She was going to her father and was to be away from Lambe House and Susan for six blessed months in every year. That was enough to make her perfectly happy.

She was going back to the dear villa, she could sit in the Poggio and swim in the blue sea and there was Angiolino Screach for her to play with.

At Calais, Christopher Lambe awaited his daughter.

"Hello, Tiny Tim," he said, "had a good crossing?"

She kissed him shyly. After a hasty, but extremely good meal in the restaurant, the trio made its way on to Paris.

Here they separated, Lady Corisande going to the house of a friend, Lambe and Daffy to the gorgeous hotel that they loved.

The next day they went on to Italy and three days later arrived just at dinner-time at the villa.

## CHAPTER XVI

**O**N the seventeenth of May, two years and a half after the making of the arrangement by which Daphne Lambe henceforth was to live every winter with her father, a small young girl dressed in smartly cut, French-looking clothes, got out of the train at Victoria and made her way through the crowd with the air of one thoroughly used to traveling and its happenings.

There was no one to meet her and she had no maid. Alone she engineered her box through the perfunctory customs examination and then hailed a four-wheeler and told the man to take her to Grosvenor Place. This young girl was Daffy Lambe.

She had failed in her own prognostication regarding her looks. Her small brown face was without any particular beauty, but for an almost classically cut nose; her dark eyes were not very large, nor were their thick lashes particularly long. Her black hair which was dry and rather bushy was plaited compactly to the back of her head, but sprang out on either side of her face quite independently of artificial support. Her mouth, which was fairly red, was too long and not full enough for beauty and the upper lip was too short, whereas her chin was a little too long, and rather pointed. The plain Miss Lambe, even then at fifteen.

The plain Miss Lambe watched London from the window of her cab with something like disgust. It was a wet day and the muddy streets and umbrella'd pedestrians were not attractive to her. She, like her father, had no patriotism at all, and while her thoughts were that day necessarily at Lambe House, her heart was in Italy in the sunshine.

When the butler opened Lord Pemberley's door to her, the look on his face stopped her coming question.

"Oh," she faltered, "am I too late?"

"Yes, Miss. The wire came an hour ago. 'is Lordship would have gone to the station, but was afraid of missing you in the crowd."

"I see. Where is His Lordship now?"

Lord Pemberley, as she spoke, came out of a room opposite the door. He looked subdued and rather nervous.

"Oh, you have come, my dear. Come in and I will tell you. Bring tea, Lubbock."

Daffy followed her uncle, and as he shut the door she said quietly:

"I—I know, Uncle Otho. Lubbock told me. Can't I go down at once?"

Pemberley looked at her. "We are starting in an hour," he answered. "I am afraid you will be very tired."

She sat down. "No, I am not tired. Poor mother."

It was a way of taking the news of her mother's death that shocked her uncle. Was she heartless?

"It was very sudden at the last, heart failure, the



wire says. Where is your father? I must telegraph him."

"He's in Paris. He brought me that far. I—I hope she didn't suffer much, Uncle Otho?"

"No, not much, so far as I know. Daffy, you—you amaze me. Don't you care at all?"

The girl looked at him, her dark eyes steady.

"Of course I do. But what's the use of crying? I never cry. Father says——"

"Oh, bother your father! I mean to say——"

The arrival of tea saved the situation and Daffy partook of hers with a good appetite.

When the wire came, three days before, saying that Lady Norah was ill, the girl had at once felt sure that her mother would die. All through the journey she had told herself that she would arrive too late, and now that she had indeed done so, she was fully prepared. In very truth she had never greatly loved her mother, who was in her mind too closely linked with the obnoxious Susan to be very dear to her, and in the last few years she had grown to adore her father with a strength of love that seemed to leave no room in her heart for other affections.

The summers at Lambe House were to her ever periods of probation, of waiting the hour when she could go back to her father in Italy. To Lady Norah's relief, the child's temper was better than it had been, but her continued silence was oppressive and the mute disregard presented by her to Susan's teasing only barely less unpleasant than her former rages.

The mother found herself watching a nature that

was utterly closed to her observation. She knew no more of Daffy than she knew of the Dowager Empress of China.

"I can't understand her in the least," the poor lady told her friend the Vicar, "she is like a complete stranger."

As for Daffy, used to the peculiar atmosphere of freedom of the villa, Lambe House was like a prison.

It was a crime here to be five minutes late for a meal, it was a crime to go out without a hat, one was bothered about one's complexion, questions were asked about the books one read, one was obliged to go to church.

Even the clothes, which now, thanks to a timely hint from Lady Corisande, were made by an artist in expensive simplicity in Paris, were made the subject of not always benevolent criticism.

In a word, Daffy hated Lambe House. Her father had spoiled her, had developed the lawlessness she had inherited from him, had encouraged her impatience of contest, her disregard of detail, until she was literally unfit for any kind of discipline. At Lambe House she was accounted as detestable, her sisters frankly disliking her.

For her part, she felt a certain tenderness for Sylvia, and a very great admiration. Sylvia's beauty was to her as potent as it had already grown to be to men. Sylvia had never been unkind to her and even now made an occasional feeble effort to make Lambe House pleasant for her sister.

Susan on the other hand derived the greatest pleas-

ure from tormenting her younger sister, and but for Daffy's new policy of silence, war would have raged all through the summers.

"How is Sylvia?" Daffy asked as the train drew up at their station that evening.

Pemberley did not know. "All right, I suppose. She's uncommon good-looking, I'm told. Haven't seen her for a long time. Hello, who's this?"

A tall man in a raincoat was approaching them, evidently with recognition. To her uncle's horror, Daffy precipitated herself into the newcomer's arms.

"Oh, Hughie," she said, "I'm so glad you've come! Where have you been all this time?"

Gunning gave her an unemotional kiss, and introduced himself to Pemberley.

"I hope you won't mind my coming down at once," he explained. "As a matter of fact poor Lady Norah wired to ask me to, as soon as she found she was not going to pull through."

Pemberley resented any one's presence who was neither a Pember nor a Lambe, and his manner plainly showed it.

"Don't be cross, Uncle Otho," said Daffy in a perfectly audible voice, "it's quite all right. He's going to marry Sylvia, aren't you, Hughie?"

Gunning was thirty years old, but at this downright remark, he blushed like a boy, and Pemberley paused, his boot on the carriage step, and looked up at him.

"Oh, I see. Well, you'd better come with us. I see there's only one carriage sent."

They drove away in silence, which was broken after

a pause by Daffy's asking suddenly, "Hughie, why did you stay in Ceylon so long? We have missed you awfully."

"Hush, Daffy," he muttered, "I'll tell you after a while."

"My niece is absolutely without all sense of propriety," Pemberly observed crossly, and silence again fell on the trio.

Gunning, who was taken up with his own thoughts, hardly noticed it when Daffy slipped her hand into his, but her uncle saw it and counted what happened to be a perfectly innocent and childlike action against her.

Arrived at the house, the wet gravel before which was slashed by many carriage wheels, the older man stalked by the butler without a word and silently shook hands with his brother, the Bishop, who looked a perfect monument of decorous grief.

"Ah, my poor Daphne!"

"How d'you do, Uncle Tom. Where's Sylvia? Oh, here's Hughie, mother sent for him."

Gunning, feeling very much in the way, but bound in view of the dead lady's appeal to stay, went quietly into the deserted drawing room. After a few minutes Daffy came in.

"I say, Hughie," she began, as nervous now as she had previously been calm, "they say I must *see* her. And I don't want to."

"Don't want to see your mother? Good heavens, Daffy, you aren't afraid, are you?"

She stood by the fire, very small and slim in her

close-fitting coat and skirt, her eyes hidden by the shadow of her quaint little hat.

"Yes, I am, I—I'm awfully afraid of dead people."

"But your own mother——"

"Hughie, please tell them I needn't. I tell you I don't want to. And what good could it do?"

He was as honestly puzzled as most normal young men would have been by this attitude.

"Don't be a silly. She loved you, your mother, and you loved her. Suppose—suppose she can see you now. She'd be awfully hurt."

Daffy unpinned her hat and threw it on the floor.

"If mother knows what I'm thinking, she wouldn't mind one bit. I—I want to remember her *alive*, Hughie, not all dead," she shuddered.

"Look here, Daffy," he said gently, laying one hand on her shoulder, "you mustn't allow yourself to get queer. There are times when one simply must be like other people and this is one of them."

She looked up, very far up, into his blue eyes.

"Hughie, you remember how afraid I was of things when I was littler?" she asked.

"Yes. You were a poor little coward, Daffy, only you didn't tell then."

"Well, I'm just as afraid now; I can't help it. A big dog, even if he doesn't see me, makes me go cold all over, perhaps because I'm so small. And fast horses, oh, dear, I *tremble* when they go tearing along. And, Hughie—don't laugh—I always have a light in my room at home. If I don't, the—the shadows frighten me. There!"

Her pointed white face was whiter than usual under the stress of confession, and he saw that she was telling the absolute truth.

"Poor Daffy-down-Dilly," he said gently.

"Well, but most of all I'm afraid of dead people. Oh, Hughie, dear, great, big, brave Hughie, do tell 'em I needn't!"

It is possible that he might have made an effort to save her from the ordeal she so dreaded, but at that moment the door opened and Sylvia came in, and he at once forgot everybody and everything else in the world.

It is hard to describe great beauty, and all that one can say of Sylvia Lambe sounds conventional and doll-like, yet she was neither in looks. She was very tall, nearly as tall as Gunning himself, and during the last two years she had grown to be almost too slim. Now, in her loose white dressing-gown, her wonderful hair tied back by a bit of black ribbon, her eyes heavy, but not red, with weeping, she was indeed lovely enough to cause any man to forget dozens of Daffies.

"Oh, Hughie," she said, holding out both her hands, "I'm so glad you have come."

"Sylvia, my dear," he stammered, taking her gently into his arms.

Daffy watched them, feeling suddenly as if a door had been closed in her face.

"Hughie, come and see her. She is so lovely." Then Sylvia saw her sister and went to her just as she had gone to Gunning, both hands extended. "Daffy dear, oh, my dear little sister," she cried brokenly.

Then she broke down and cried with her arms round the younger girl. After a long moment she withdrew, and turning to Gunning said, her face dimpling into a faint smile, "Lend me your handkerchief, Hughie. I forgot to bring one, and now come, Daffy will want to see her."

Daffy shot a look of agony at Gunning, but he did not even see it, and unable to resist any longer, Daffy allowed herself to be led to the death chamber.

## CHAPTER XVII

**T**HE house was full for the next few days. The Pembers were of those who always gather in full force at family functions of any kind, and their strongest feelings were involved in the matter of funerals.

None was ever too busy or too ill, unless at death's very door, to hasten from all parts of the kingdom when one of their numerous clan took unto him or herself a life partner or left this world.

Even Lady Corisande, the frivolous one, had only missed one funeral and two weddings since she was of an age to go to them, and Lord Pemberley was supposed to have been seriously annoyed with her because at the time of the second of the weddings she had been no farther away than Berlin.

So Lambe House was now packed almost to discomfort with solemn-eyed Pembers, leavened only by two outside Lambes, Christopher's old uncle, who was well over eighty and not quite right in his mind, and a Mrs. Larbord, Christopher's cousin. These two were his nearest relations.

The Bishop's wife arrived the day after Daffy, Lady Rayburnham, Lady Corisande and her small dry husband, Fred Peplow, came in the same train, then there was poor Lady Pember who always felt herself in



disgrace because of her unsuccessful efforts to produce an heir, Bill and his wife (both big and burly and louder-voiced than the others), Charles who had never married, and whose open preferences for Paris, where he had a flat, was considered by the family to be peculiar almost to the verge of infirmity. Charles was Susan's godfather, and sent her twenty pounds every birthday.

Lady Mary Grainger-Clay, the youngest sister, was there, but without her husband, as he had died a year before. Her eyes were still wet for him.

Young Dunstan, just back from his travels, completed the list of brothers and sisters, but not of guests, for there were cousins as well, and even one uncle and an uncle-in-law as well.

After the excitement and tragedy of poor dear Norah's death, the favorite subject of conversation was of course Christopher's behavior.

He arrived as soon as he could get there after receiving Pemberley's wire, and his demeanor was that of any other well-behaved guest in a house of mourning. The Bishop played host, and did it very well, by general consent.

When Christopher had been discussed to satiety, the mourners fell back on the great beauty of the two elder girls.

"I never saw a lovelier girl than Sylvia," each and every one declared, "I suppose Corisande will bring her out."

It rained steadily for three days, so there was little or no fresh air to be had and tempers grew restive.

Fred Peplow, the best little man in the world, got on everybody's nerves, and Lady Mary and Dunny had a really acrimonious quarrel, regarding the effect of high heels on the health. Dunny, being now engaged to an Australian heiress, had grown vastly in self-importance, and considered that his opinion should be more valued than it was by the family.

The evening before the funeral Daffy sat alone by an open window in the old schoolroom. The rain had ceased and from the soaked earth came pleasant and hopeful spring smells. The trees were just breaking into a foam of delicate green, hardly yet to be called leaves, for the winter had been a long one, and the tulips in the large formal parterres were hardly out of their prison although the middle of May was past.

Daffy was very pale in her black frock and her small face had a worn, drawn look.

What she had told Hugh Gunning about her own cowardice was perfectly true. It was a constitutional thing and while her self-control was great enough to hide it as a rule, no amount of effort could steady the inward quivering that came to her when she was frightened. The house of death had got on to her nerves to an extent almost unbearable; she was nearly ill and recollections of the ghoulis conversation of old uncle Gerald, to whose particular entertainment the Bishop had told her off, kept her awake at night.

Uncle Gerald could remember the funeral of every Lambe of the last twenty-five years, and his memory for gruesome detail was terrific.

"I like you, Sarah," he said to Daffy, over and over

again, "because you are all Lambe, and because you like to listen when I talk."

Why he called her Sarah no one knew, but it was useless reminding him that that was not her name.

Now, after a full hour of memories connected with the death from cancer of his eldest daughter in '69, Daffy, quite ill with horror, had run away here to the schoolroom for a rest.

No one ever came here. It was a shabby and unattractive room, looking out over the least beautiful part of the grounds, but at least it was quiet and Uncle Gerald did not know of its existence.

The young girl sat on the floor by the window, her elbows on the sill, her head leaning against the window frame. It was nearly seven o'clock and soon she must go and dress.

She was very tired; it had been a dreadful day. They talked so much, all the relations, all except Uncle Fred, and he stayed upstairs most of the time. Daffy's father, whom she so loved, was very busy. The Bishop had much to say to him and the greater part of each day he was not to be found except at meal times. Sylvia and Susan, both of whom were heart-broken over their mother's death, were allowed by the relations to stay upstairs without comment, but Daffy, who was clearly not nearly so distressed as she should have been, was expected to be useful, and no one knew better than herself how really useless she was.

The Vicar had to be seen, and introduced to such of the tribe as did not know him, and this duty fell on

Daffy, who strongly disliked the smug occupation. Certain tenants, too, called, and it was felt that they deserved a polite word from one of the afflicted, which one was always Daffy, who invariably said the wrong thing, or, still more, called them by the wrong name.

She was so tired! The stable clock struck the three-quarters. Fifteen minutes more she could sit there in the restful quiet and then she must go.

Suddenly the light of a cigar caught her eye in the shrubbery. It was high up from the ground and so could not be in the mouth of little Uncle Fred. Who else would be smoking so brazenly?

Then suddenly the sinner emerged into the open space near the house, and Daffy, leaning out of the window, called him.

"Hughie! I say, Hughie!"

Gunning looked up, his cigar in his hand.

"Is that *you*?"

Daffy knew by a something in his voice that she was not the "you" he meant.

"No," she said regretfully, "it's only me, Daffy. But do come up here, Hughie. You may smoke here."

"All right. Where are you?"

"In the schoolroom, *you* know, you go past the yellow room and up the little stairs——"

"Yes, yes, I know."

He disappeared, and a few minutes later came into the room.

"This is a good idea," he commented, drawing a chair to the window and sitting down. "I got so fed up with the family, I couldn't stand it; the old man is

looking for you, and the Bishop wanted you a while ago."

"Let 'em look. Oh, Hughie, what a horribly barbarous thing a funeral party is!"

"Beastly. And yet, what else could one do? I say, Daffy, how is Sylvia? I haven't seen her all day."

"She's been asleep since four. She's all right."

"Asleep!" The rapture on his good-looking, rather severe face gave it, to Daffy's critical eyes, a look almost idiotic.

"Yes, wonderful of her to go to sleep, isn't it?"

"Don't be nasty. You're a good little thing, Daff, but sometimes you seem just a little——"

"Spiteful. That's my envious disposition." She finished calmly, "Don't be an ass, Hughie."

"Well, you don't appreciate the girls; that much is true."

Daffy stared at him.

"Oh, you—you—really Hughie! Even you bracket 'em together. Why can't you see that Sylvia really is good and kind in her rather stupid way, and that Susan is a—a cat?"

"Sylvia stupid!" returned the man impatiently, "I am ashamed of you, Daphne."

"You needn't be, and you needn't call me Daphne. I *like* Sylvia, yes, I do, and if Susan wasn't always there, I'd *love* her. But, well, she isn't clever. Her brain is half asleep, I think. But she's *all right* and Susan is all wrong. You wait and see. That's what I wanted to say to you. Marry her quick, Hughie, and get her away from Susan."

She spoke, he now saw, without spitefulness and with the reasonable dislike of a grown person. After a pause he said slowly:

"How am I to marry her quick, Daffy? I've never said a word to her about it. I promised your poor mother I wouldn't. And now, it wouldn't be decent for a while, anyhow. Besides, suppose she says no!"

Daffy rose to her knees and looked at him very earnestly.

"Look here, Hughie," she said, in a way that impressed him in spite of her youth, "listen to me. Sylvia is getting old. She will be nineteen in November and she would have come out this season if mother hadn't been seedy, I mean to say, ill. Well, she is a great beauty. Dunny told me that there isn't a woman in London as good-looking as she is. And Aunt Corry and Aunt Mary and even Aunt Maud want to take her to live with them—with her—you know what I mean, and then she'll meet all the men in England and they'll all want to marry her, and then where'll you be?"

"I know, Daffy," he answered humbly, his smooth brown head in his hands.

"You see," went on his mentor, "it isn't as if she was in love with you. She isn't. And I'd marry you like a shot myself if you wanted me to, Hughie, and I love you dearly, but, well after all, you aren't much of a catch for a great beauty, are you?"

"Course I'm not."

"When they used to play with dolls, Susan's al-

ways used to marry great musicians, but Sylvia's *never* married anything under a Duke. So you see!"

Gunning forgot that he was thirty and his adviser fifteen.

"Well, what do you think I'd better do?" he asked, looking at her, his blue eyes suddenly haggard. Her answer was ready.

"Ask her *at once*. Father will be glad and she is almost bound to say yes, because she's never seen any other men. Besides, she's not a bit conceited, Sylvia, I don't believe she has an idea what her looks are worth. Now Susan——"

"Never mind Susan. Look here, Daffy, your mother wired to me a week ago, asking me to come. And she also said—look," he took the bit of paper from his pocket and handed it to her, "'I am dying. Please come. You have my full permission regarding what you asked me two years ago. Norah Lambe.'"

Daffy read it twice and gave it back to him.

"My dear Hughie, you are as good as engaged, now, with that to show her. Sylvia adored mother, and she'd marry Phipps if mother had sent him such a wire."

Phipps being the head gardener, one of the ugliest men extant, Gunning burst out laughing.

"Yours is certainly a sootherin' tongue, oh, youngest Miss Lambe," he chuckled, "am I as awful as Phipps?"

Daffy paid no heed to his question.

"We must go and dress now. I say, Hughie, to-morrow after the funeral, I'll get her in here and then

you come. I may have to chloroform Susan, but I'll manage somehow."

"Good little Daffy!" Suddenly he saw her once more as the child she really was and he reddened. "Funny, you helping me with my—my wooing," he said, rising. "I am not shy as a rule, but with her—ah, Daffy dear, some day you'll care for some man as I do for her, and then you'll understand."

She laughed. "Poor old Hughie!" she answered.



## CHAPTER XVIII

**M**OST of the guests left the afternoon of the funeral. Uncle Gerald stayed, being supposedly too tired, at his age, to leave after the excitement of burying a niece, and Uncle Fred and Aunt Corisande Peplow and Dunstan Pember. The others departed in small groups of twos and threes, their minds, it is to be hoped, calm with the consciousness of duty done. Another Pember gone and the family had, as ever, risen to the occasion and graced it. Now they could go home in peace.

On two points were they unconsciously agreed: the perfect correctness of Sylvia and Susan, the strangeness of Daphne.

"She did not cry at all," commented the Bishop's lady, in the carriage on the way to the station.

"And she looked frightened out of her wits the whole time. Evidently no Christian belief," added Lady Mary. "Now Sylvia and Susan—*perfect!*"

Meantime the three girls, left at last to themselves, dined quietly with the Peplows, Dunny Pember and Hugh Gunning. Uncle Gerald had gone to bed.

Sylvia, in black, was, like most fresh, fair women, at her best, and Susan to some people was very nearly as lovely. She was not so tall, but equally slim as her sister, her slightly darker hair grew in perfect even

waves that would have made the late Mr. Marcel die of envy. Her mouth was more classically perfect than Sylvia's, and her eyes only less good.

Analysis failed to show *why* Sylvia was indisputably the more beautiful, but so it was, and it was, even in the jaundiced Daffy's eyes, greatly to Susan's credit that she was quite free of all taint of jealousy of her sister. The two girls were devoted to each other and even the Vicar had been moved to comparing them to twin rosebuds on one stem.

Lady Corisande, who had, in the relief of the return from the funeral, made up her complexion in a positive riot of color, watched the two lovely young faces in the silence of the early part of the meal and then suddenly burst out.

"Of course, Christopher, I shall bring 'em out next spring!"

Lambe looked up from his fish. "The girls? I don't know; Lady Pember has offered to see Sylvia through it."

"Nonsense, Maud's girls are out and their dullness couldn't help affecting Sylvia. Besides, Maud's relatives are the dullest fogies on earth. I am obviously the one to do it. Give 'em to me and I'll guarantee them a success such as hasn't been made for years!"

"We shall see," returned their father. "But why should they be such a success? They aren't clever. That is, Sylvia isn't."

Sylvia smiled faintly. "No, father, I am not a bit clever. But Susan is. You haven't heard her play yet."

"I'll bet on Susan," remarked Dunstan, "if I weren't her uncle I'd marry her myself."

He was an unbaked-looking young man with a maddeningly supercilious smile. He was dull, incapable and unbeautiful, but his conceit was like the sea, because it was infinite.

Susan looked at him with a smile approaching a sneer.

"*Would* you?" she asked. "Don't turn my head, Dunny."

Fred Peplow fidgeted. Rows upset him.

"Are you going back to Italy, Kit?" he asked, to avert the one that threatened.

"Of course. I am going," continued Lambe with no expression whatsoever on his face, "to take all three girls back with me until July. Then we are going to Switzerland."

A bomb-shell could hardly have created more surprise, though it would have been more devastating.

The Peplows gasped, Dunny Pember upset his wine and Sylvia and Susan clasped hands under the table.

"Well," asked Lambe impatiently, "why shouldn't I take my own daughters to my own house?"

"My dear Christopher, nobody has said a word," protested Peplow wildly. "And that we are surprised as well as gratified ought not to surprise you. In any other father it would be regarded as perfectly natural, but your attitude has hitherto been——"

"Don't talk literature, Fred," interrupted his wife, "eat your dinner like a good old dear." Fred as a rule was merely chatty in a delicate, superficial way,

but on occasion his tongue assumed a terrible fluency and a curious poignancy. This threatened to be an occasion.

Dunny laughed. He enjoyed a row.

The three girls, the objects of this discussion, sat quite mute, the two elder ones seemingly indifferent; Daffy's mouth closed firmly over something she evidently wished against her better judgment to say.

"*I am* glad," put in Gunning, "my mother will be there through July, and—I am going out, too, if—if things are all right."

The interview with Sylvia had not yet taken place, and immediately after dinner Daffy engineered it. When Sylvia was safely settled in the schoolroom and told to go to sleep, a task always willingly performed by her, and Susan had with some difficulty been prevented from following her, Daffy went back to the drawing room.

"Oh, Hughie," she said, "I want to speak to you. Do you mind coming for a minute?"

Gunning followed her, his face very white. It was a very momentous thing for him, this talk with Sylvia. He had loved her for years, although she was even now hardly a woman, and in the realness of his love he felt himself so greatly her inferior that he wondered even at the eleventh hour if he should have the courage to ask her to marry him.

"Oh, how cold your hands are," the friendly Daffy exclaimed as she accompanied him to the foot of the little staircase. "Buck up!"

"I say, Daffy, don't let any one come in, will you?"

He turned and looked anxiously at her.

"No, I'll sit here on the stairs, and if any one comes I'll say she is asleep."

Even at such a moment he was shocked at the readiness of her lie. "I say, you mustn't," he began in an admonitory tone, but she cut him short.

"Oh, do go on, Hughie, and don't preach. If I say 'you can't go in because Hughie is asking her to be his w——' they'd all go in of course! Now do be *quick*."

He went on upstairs. She heard his knock at the door, then its opening and closing and all was still.

Sitting down on the stairs in the dark, Daffy mounted guard. It was really frightfully grown-up of Sylvia to be having proposals. They could not be married for some time yet, of course, but they would be engaged and she'd have a ring and Hughie would kiss her occasionally. "I hope some one will marry Susan soon; I couldn't stay on with her after Sylvia left," mused the sentry, her chin in her hands. "But I daresay one of the aunts will take her. Father is doing his duty, but he will be glad to be rid of them. Then he and I shall be alone again. Poor mother. Oh, I wish——" she shuddered as the memory of the dead face they had forced her to see, came back to her. If only they had let her remember her living mother. That person on the bed with roses on her breast wasn't her mother at all, it——

It was dark on the stairs and the great house was

very quiet. If only some one would come. Any one, even a housemaid. But no one came.

Somewhere in the distance a clock ticked slowly, Daffy counted the ticks. Then she told herself that she was fifteen, nearly grown up, and in her own father's house; that her sister was only ten yards away, and that with her sister was big, friendly Hughie Gunning; that there was absolutely nothing to be afraid of.

And yet in spite of all this wisdom, she *was* afraid and her fear grew every minute.

Without rising, she crept a step or two higher, nearer to Sylvia and Hughie. For a moment she felt better, but the terror came back again and now she was cold all over.

She crept up three more steps and was now at the top of the stairs. There was the door. Behind it were those two. If she were with them she would no longer be afraid.

Before the door lay a black wooly rug, attached to that particular place in the days of poor, neuralgic Ruggles. It seemed to Daffy that if she could lie on the rug, her troubles would be over. She crept to it on all fours and sank softly into it, one hand touching the lintel. After a minute the beating of her heart subsided to its normal rate, her breath came.

With the cessation of terror, however, came her old feeling of shame at her own silliness and a deep blush burned her ears. "I will never be a coward again," she vowed, "never, never."

Thus suddenly Gunning's voice came to her through the door:

"Sylvia, darling," he was stammering, "I will do my very best to make you happy. I—I know I am not *nearly* good enough for you."

Daffy raised her head excitedly. Good! She had said yes, then, so poor old Hughie was happy. "*I am glad!*" She had no thought of eavesdropping, her one conscious sensation was that of benevolent satisfaction in the success of her plan, and she was about to rise, now no longer frightened, and go back to her place on the stairs, when the door opposite suddenly opened and Susan came out, followed by a stream of light.

"What's that?" the elder girl exclaimed sharply, and she broke off with a little laugh; "little sneak," she said, crossing the passage, "is Hughie in there with Sylvia? Yes, I hear him. Really, Daffy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Daffy scrambled to her feet. "I'm not a sneak," she declared fiercely, "I've only just this minute come, and didn't come to listen at all!"

Susan smiled. "Oh, no, of course not. You lay down there to rest, of course, it's the usual place, isn't it? I wonder what Sylvia will say?"

"You—you won't tell," stammered Daffy, "honor bright, Susan, I wasn't sneaking. Oh, *please* don't tell!"

But Susan was enjoying herself. She opened the door sharply.

"Sylvia, I say," she began, when she drew back as

if something had struck. Sylvia lay on the battered old sofa, and by her Hugh Gunning was kneeling, his face, with a wonderful expression on it, in the full light. "Oh!" gasped Susan.

Sylvia moved slowly and raised her head.

"Is it you, Susan, dear? Come in," she said calmly. "Who is that behind you?"

"It's only me, Sylvia," declared Daffy, coming into the room, "and don't believe her. I *wasn't* sneaking at all, indeed, indeed, I wasn't."

Gunning, who had risen, turned toward her.

"What is it?" he asked sternly.

Susan entered with slow steps; her face was white and her mouth drawn a little to the left as Daffy had seen it once or twice when she was very angry.

"Nothing," she said, "only I found Daffy listening at the door."

It must be remembered that Susan believed herself to be speaking the truth.

"At the door?" Sylvia gave a little puzzled frown. "But she didn't know, Hughie—I mean to say——"

Gunning's frown was one of anger and drew his straight dark brows together in a kind of knot above his nose.

"Were you listening at the door, Daffy?" he asked.

"I was lying on the rug, and I heard you say one sentence. And I didn't come because I wanted to hear," she said obstinately.

"Then why were you on the rug?" He remembered her proposed falsehood of a few minutes before.

"I was on the rug, because—I won't tell you why,"



she flashed back. Then her face settled into an expression of dogged sullenness.

Sylvia, always gently disposed, came toward her.

"Daffy, dear, do tell us. If you were on the rug, what else could Susan think?"

But Daffy retreated slowly toward the door.

"I won't tell. You may all think what you like, particularly Hughie. I don't care."

When she had gone, the three looked at each other.

"Surely she must have had some reason," Sylvia began, but Gunning, his shyness up in arms at the thought of his first and only love-making being listened to, cut her short gently.

"She is not truthful," he said, "and no doubt she *was* listening."

Daffy, on her way downstairs, heard this speech, and stood for a moment rooted to the spot. Then she went slowly to her own room and locked the door.

## CHAPTER XIX

**T**HERE was a terrible storm that night on the Sussex coast. The wind, which had been rising rapidly all day, reached its climax toward midnight, and swept like an army of wild things round Lambe House, bearing on its wings the deep sound of the thundering sea.

Hugh Gunning, too happy to sleep, spent the greater part of the night by his window, closing it from time to time when the driving rain threatened to do serious damage to the room behind him, opening it again when the tempest seemed to quiet down.

Once the young man went downstairs and fetched a book, but he could not read and soon put out his light once more and watched the night progress toward morning.

The episode of Daffy's listening at the door had quite faded from his mind, which was naturally occupied with the future which was so golden to him.

"How frightened I was," he mused, laughing indulgently at that strange, inglorious young man of the evening before, that Hugh Gunning to whom no Goddess had bent from Olympus! "Lord, how my voice shook when I asked might I come in! The dear! Oh, the blessed angel, how lovely she looked asleep on that old sofa."

It would have amused Daffy to know that Sylvia had been asleep when the momentous interview began. "And her lovely hair was like a golden veil. What was it she said? Oh, yes, 'Is that you, Susan?' And then when she saw it was me, and she pinned her hair up in a big lump, and said so sweetly, 'Come in, Hughie dear!'"

Sylvia had, once she was thoroughly awake, been glad to see her friend. Her mother had loved him, and Daffy had explained that Lady Norah had sent for him, and so he was doubly welcome.

He showed her the telegram and she had cried a little, so he had lent her his handkerchief, and for a few minutes they had talked of the poor lady who had died.

Then Gunning had asked her to marry him. Seek in his memory as he might, he could not recall the vital words in which he had couched the great question. Had he said, "Sylvia, dear, I love you. Will you marry me?" Or had he been humbler and begun by self-belittlement?

It seriously annoyed him that he could not remember, but as a matter of fact he had burst out, "Oh, Sylvia, she said I might ask you—do you think you could ever marry me?"

And Sylvia, whose mind was always more or less of a blank on which any hand might inscribe ideas for her, had said almost without hesitation that if darling mamma had wished it, and he did, she didn't see why she shouldn't.

Then he had kissed her hands and said the words

the unfortunate Daffy had overheard, and Susan had opened her door.

Sylvia, as he sat by his window through the night, was sleeping soundly, dreaming of nothing, hardly moving in her utter peace, as the hours passed.

It is much easier to describe a complicated mind than to give any outsider an idea of a mind like the beautiful Miss Lambe's.

She was kind, she was not abnormally selfish, she was not precisely dull. She had been well educated and her occasional necessary speeches were not remarkable for stupidity. She was like a wound-up automaton more than a living girl, and she went through the movements accurately, but she had not one single original idea or one pulse in her whole composition.

This Gunning did not know, and it would have been a very exceptional man who, looking at such beauty as Sylvia's, would have noticed her deficiencies. If she said it was fine, she looked so lovely that her words seemed perfection, too.

When they were interrupted and Sylvia suggested that they should all go back to the drawing room, Gunning had been disappointed, but even that had seemed perfect. Susan, who had said nothing of what she saw when she opened the door, left them at the foot of the little stairs and went to her own room.

There Sylvia had said, "Hughie, am I very untidy?" And, emboldened by the dark of the corridor and its emptiness, he kissed her and she smiled at him.

She was, he reflected, too young, too perfectly unconscious to be confused by a kiss.

They sat for another hour listening to the dull, tired-out talk of their elders in the drawing room, and the party had then broken up for the night.

In all the vast house only three people were awake. Of the others, Susan sat crouching in her bed, her eyes fierce and bright. Susan, though only seventeen, was much older in some ways than Sylvia. She was cleverer, in the first place, and then no part of her mind was asleep, as Sylvia's seemed to be.

And Sylvia had been *hers*.

Twofold jealousy raged in the girl that night; jealousy of Gunning for taking Sylvia from her, and jealousy of Sylvia for taking Gunning from her. She loved only these two people in the whole world, and they were each robbing her of the other.

It is a curious thing that Susan Lambe, of the three sisters, undoubtedly the worst in character, was the only one with a strong maternal instinct.

She was not only perfectly innocent, but as nearly ignorant in some aspects of life as a girl of her age could be. Yet she not only loved Gunning, but her chief hurt in the conflict she so suddenly found herself engaged in was that now Sylvia and not she should be the mother of Gunning's children. She loved Sylvia passionately, but she had never been other than wide-eyed to her sister's strange lack of personality. "She is beautiful," had always been the unformulated thought, "but she isn't a real person; she has no inside

self." And thinking thus she had underrated Sylvia's effect on the male imagination.

Gunning liked Sylvia best, yes, but when they were grown up his mind would naturally turn to hers—to Susan's.

She had never once seen, what Daffy had known for years, that Gunning had loved Sylvia with a man's love for the one woman almost before she had grown away from childhood.

And now the shock was so much the greater.

Susan Lambe was unscrupulous and strong-willed. The end of her stormy night was the thought, as she finally dropped asleep exhausted, "He shall not marry her. I'll prevent it somehow."

Meantime Gunning was being led by his restless happiness into an adventure.

The stable clock had struck half-past three when he put on a long coat and a cap and crept through the silent house to the front door. The storm was still raging, but the rain had ceased, and there were breaks in the lead-colored clouds. Day was close on the heels of night and he felt that he must have a walk.

The ground slopped about under his feet, the lawn was like a great sponge, and the trees oozed water from every pore.

Gunning crossed the lawn to the left, went up a flight of steep stone steps, and after a quick tramp under thick-set trees came out on the downs. Here, by comparison with the darkness he had left behind him, day seemed to have come.

He sniffed eagerly at the fresh air and stuffed his cap into his pocket.

It was good to be out of doors. He would like to shout to the coming dawn that Sylvia was his, that he was a king among men.

Instead of which he whistled softly between his teeth as he went toward the sea. The great waves roared angrily on the beach, singing and whirling round the little jetty off to the right. Their noise was deafening.

He stood at the edge of the cliff looking down. The water was dashing up to the foot of the wooden steps, which looked very frail and unsafe under its onslaught.

Suddenly Gunning gave a little exclamation and looked fixedly down the steps to where at the water's edge a little dark heap lay.

At first he thought it was somebody lying there, and then he saw that it was only a heap of clothing.

"What on earth—"

No one was in sight and it was only four o'clock. Whose clothes could be lying there, almost in the sea, and where was their owner?

Stricken by a sudden fear, he went slowly down the steps into the darkness of the little cave.

"Are you there?" he called.

No one answered.

Down he went, farther and farther, and then as he reached the foot of the steps he recognized a dark cloak that Daffy had been wearing of late.

All round him stretched the sea, cold and dark and menacing. He stood still and shouted.

"Daffy!"

Still no answer. Then he saw, a quarter of a mile out, a small dark thing coming slowly toward him. It was Daffy's head. She came nearer and nearer, and before she, battling with the waves, had seen him, he could see that she was very pale.

When she saw him she paused.

"Go away," she called. "What do you want?"

"Come in out of that freezing water."

"I can't come in till you go away," she called back, "I have no clothes on."

Relieved in spite of his amazement, he retired to the top of the steps, and in a few minutes she joined him, clothed, staggering a little and very white.

"What on earth have you been doing?" he asked her, now that she was safe, thoroughly angry with her.

"Hughie," she laid one icy little paw on his sleeve and looked solemnly at him, "*I wasn't* listening. On my word of honor I wasn't. Do you believe me?"

"Of course I do. But—what were you doing?"

So she told him the little tale, of her senseless terror, of her creeping closer to the door for mere human companionship. "*You know* what a coward I am," she added.

"Yes, I know. Poor little Daffy. Well, I believe you, but why didn't you tell them?"

It was day now and Gunning always remembered the queer luminousness of her cold little face in the uncanny light.



"Because," she spoke slowly, "I *hate* Susan and I'd rather have her think me a sneak than know I am a coward."

"Oh, I say!" Gunning's power of speech fled under his surprise at her words.

"Yes, *far* rather. But *you* said that I told lies and so *had* probably eavesdropped."

"Well—you do tell lies," he protested. "I've often meant to go for you about it, Daffy, and now that I'm going to be your brother—"

"Wait a minute, Hughie—and if you don't mind I'll lean on you. I am never going to tell another lie as long as I live. You *must* believe me. You know how frightened I am of—of things. Well—" she was indeed leaning on him and he was alarmed by a queer look in her face, "I went to-night at one o'clock through the storm, all alone to—to the churchyard, and—I swore it on mother's—on mother's grave—"

She did not so much fall as slide, like something liquid, through his arms to the ground.

For a moment he talked to her, telling her to be good and get up and go home with him, and then, seeing that she was quite unconscious, he picked her up and carried her back to the house.

## CHAPTER XX

**I**T always seemed to Gunning that Daffy was never again after that night quite the same child that she had been before it.

She did not seem exactly older, for in some subtle way her efforts to overcome her life-long habit of telling comfortable little lies gave her a childlike earnestness about trifles that increased her youthful aspect rather than decreased it.

It was to Gunning almost piteous to watch her pause in the full flight of some harmless fib and take it back with a stony face.

But nevertheless she had changed in some way he could not exactly define, and occupied though he was with his own happiness, he yet found time to study her.

Ten days after the funeral Lambe took his family abroad and Gunning, in his character of accepted suitor, accompanied them.

It was an exceedingly warm day and the boat was crowded. Lambe and Gunning having secured a cabin for the girls, Lambe walked away and sat reading all the way across.

Gunning found chairs and the four young people sat down. Suddenly it occurred to him that Susan looked ill.

"Anything wrong, Sukey?" he asked her, using an old nickname of his own for her.

She looked up from the book.

"What should be wrong?" she asked coldly, "and I wish you wouldn't call me by that obnoxious name, Hugh."

"All right, sorry. Let me," his voice changing suddenly as he turned to Sylvia, "put that cushion behind you, dearest."

Susan's upper lip stirred scornfully as she sat with her eyes fixed on her book.

Sylvia fanned herself. "How very warm it is, Hugh," she said presently, "quite uncomfortable. I think I'll take a little nap if you don't mind."

She closed her eyes and in a moment was sound asleep, her delicate coloring brought into relief by the deep blue of her pillow.

Daffy, who sat opposite to her, leaned toward Gunning.

"Hughie, look at those two men. How they stare at Sylvia. They can't be English."

They were not. They were obviously Latins, in spite of their London made clothes, and the elder of the two was extremely handsome in his exotic way. After a few seconds' talk with one of the hovering seamen, the strangers were provided with chairs, and sitting down, settled themselves for the crossing. The handsome one's velvety black eyes wandered ostentatiously round the neighboring faces, and once or twice he directed his friend's attention to some one off to the right or left, but invariably his gaze came back and

settled on Sylvia. It was a strange gaze, extremely pertinacious and at the same time inoffensive. He stared, it was plain, because he could not resist doing so, but he had no wish to be observed in it, and when he met Gunning's eyes he at once looked away.

"Isn't he funny?" whispered Daffy, "and did ever you see such eyelashes in your life?"

Susan continued to read and Sylvia slept on as peacefully as if she were in her bed at Lambe House. Gunning and Daffy exchanged a few remarks from time to time, and the exotic one continued his gazing.

"I've seen that chap somewhere," said Gunning to Daffy, as the boat neared the pier, "and I can't think where. He might be a small royalty—now they're gone, thank goodness."

Sylvia opened her beautiful mouth and showed many teeth in a yawn as unconscious as that of a kitten. Then she opened her eyes and rumped up her nose.

"Ah-h, I've been asleep," she said, with the air of one declaring an astonishing fact.

"You have, indeed, and here we are in Calais. The first time you've been in France."

Sylvia rose, still yawning, but now suppressing the fact with a slim hand.

"*I am* so sleepy," she answered. France or Timbuctoo, it was all the same to her.

Susan was different, history interested her and in her schoolgirl mind at once appeared a vision of Mary

Queen of Scots waving her hand to the fair land she was leaving.

Daffy meantime was helping the excited and hen-like Judd, her sisters' maid, to get the luggage on shore.

Judd, who was extremely indignant that the porter she had chosen spoke in French, was driving several people to desperation by her antics in the gangway. Her own bag was lost and of course was to her of far more importance than the ninety and nine bags, so to speak, of her young ladies!

"I 'ad it when we came on board," she kept saying, "I 'ad it in my 'and—"

"Oh, do be quiet, Judd," said Daffy good-naturedly, "don't yell so. If it's in the boat you'll find it. Now, where's your landing-ticket? Give it to the man—no—I don't want it. Give it to the *man*."

Judd, who was now weeping, declared that the only thing she desired in life was a speedy return to her own country, and Daffy, leaving her to look for her lost bag, went on with the infuriated porter to the douane, where she got her things through with the rapidity and facility of the born traveler, who most decidedly *nascitur non fit*.

When her task was over she prepared to follow her sisters and their bodyguard into the restaurant, when the handsome dark man of the boat came up to her, a small black bag in his hand.

"Pardon, mademoiselle," he said in bad French, "I believe this is the object lost by your maid?"

Daffy took it. "Oh, thanks so much, it is very *aimable* of you," she returned hastily. Then she went on to the restaurant.

At a table at the far end of the crowded room sat Judd, but she failed to see Daffy's signal, so the girl took the bag to where her father had conducted his party and where a strange-looking but extremely toothsome ragout of beef and onions was being partaken of.

"That good-looking man, the foreigner, found Judd's bag and brought it to me. Nice and civil, wasn't it? I think he had been back on to the boat for it."

"My dear Daff, *we* are the foreigners now, not the French and Italians," commented Lambe. "I've seen the fellow somewhere. He's not French, I should think, too big."

"My word, this stew, or whatever it is, is good," remarked Sylvia. "More, please."

And she looked as if honey dew and the milk of Paradise were fit food for her.

Just as the party was leaving a small and corpulent German, with his hair cut so like a hair brush as to obviate all necessity for his possessing such an article, came up to the table.

Making a lengthy and gruff remark which none of the party understood, he glared at Lambe and awaited an answer.

"Sorry, sir, we none of us have the privilege of speaking your beautiful language," returned Lambe civilly in French.

The man began again, this time with the obvious intention of being offensive.

Lambe called a waiter. "Ask this person what the matter is," he said impatiently, "we don't understand him."

But the waiter unfortunately knew only his own language and English.

"I will call anoizzer waiter," he said, and disappeared.

A train whistled, the train for Brussels-Cologne. The German became violent. Two Americans at the next table attempted to come to the rescue, and then as the train whistled again the German made a dive at Judd's bag and fled with it toward the door.

"Hi, stop him—that's my bag," called Lambe, now thoroughly angry, "he's mad or drunk—stop him."

Two waiters caught the raging Teuton, whose language was apparently extremely inflamed, and while the train slid away a fat German lady came forward and engaged in conversation with her countryman.

"The gentleman say he will his loggage have; that the bag to him certainly belongs."

"The bag, certainly not," declared Daffy, "it's my sister's maid's bag; it was left on the boat and a gentleman went back and got it."

"He says it his own bag is. He will have it or he will the police call," continued the old lady gently. "He is very aufgeregt, the gentleman."

There was now a crowd gathered round the disputants and the train was going in a few minutes.

"Call Judd," suggested Susan sensibly, and Gunning went for her.

"Come here, will you, Judd," he said, "the young ladies want you."

Judd, murmuring something about leaving her cup of tea, made her way through the crowd.

"Yes, miss?" she asked sourly.

"Oh, there you are." Daffy held up the bag which had been wrested from the adversary.

"This lunatic thinks your bag is his, Judd—a gentleman brought it off the boat."

Judd swallowed her last bit of bread and butter.

"Beg pardon, miss," she returned, "that isn't my bag at all. I never see it before."

As she spoke she produced her own bag and the German uttered a loud yell of rage and danced up and down.

"The gentleman says he has his train missed; he was going to Coln and the train has several minutes, before during the talking, gone."

Daffy turned a deep red.

"Oh, dear," she moaned, "what an idiot I am. That man told me it was Judd's bag and I took it. I had never seen Judd's bag in my life. Oh," to the old lady, "please tell him how *dreadfully* sorry I am."

The old lady explained, but the man continued to prance and scold.

At last Lambe, with a polite apology, forced on his acceptance gold pieces for his lost train and a large bottle of beer for his immediate consolation.



No one of the Lambe party spoke until they were in the train. Then Susan said:

"Really, Daffy, you are *too* stupid! Why couldn't you at least *ask* Judd?"

Daffy's humiliation was extreme, but she would stand no correction from Susan.

"Oh, do shut up, Susan," she answered rudely. "I was at least *working* when it happened, and however stupid I am, I was trying to help your maid."

Susan subsided.

At Amiens, as Sylvia dozed in her corner, Daffy, leaning out looking for the macaroon man, turned excitedly to Gunning. "Oh, Hughie," she cried, "there's the dark man again—the man who brought the bag."

"I dare say," laughed Gunning.

## CHAPTER XXI

ONE day in late June Donna Mabel Acquadolce was sitting in her high-perched pergola on one of the hills behind Sorrento reading a novel.

It was very warm, even now at five o'clock, but the little lady was used to heat and did not mind it. She sat at one end of the pergola and before her spread a very beautiful view, at which she hardly glanced.

Near her, on a little rustic table, stood a jug of iced barley-water and two glasses, one of which was unused.

Donna Mabel wore a short-sleeved frock of pale mousseline de soie, on which sprawled roses, and on a chair near lay an elaborately frilled pink sunbonnet. Her make-up, innocently obvious, was carefully put on that day, but her hair, hitherto of a bright reddish brown, was now frankly gray, so that her faded face looked the younger for its softening effect.

Below the pergola lay the little formal garden, its trees and plants now gray with dust, for there had been no rain for a month, then came the villa, newly painted a delicate shell pink, and beyond and below it trees and more villas down to the distant bay, very blue in the sun.

"Arrigo!"

Donna Mabel closed her book impatiently and called in a highly pitched voice, "Arrigo!"

After a long pause an old man in brand new livery came out of the house, one wrinkled hand to his eyes. "Eccellenza!"

Slowly he came up the slope, and pausing at the foot of the steps that led to the pergola, he drew a deep breath and began the ascent.

"You needn't come up, Arrigo," his mistress called down to him kindly. "I only want to know the time. Clara forgot to give me my watch."

"It is twenty minutes to eighteen o'clock, Eccellenza," he answered, referring to his own timepiece.

"The carriage is late."

"Si, Eccellenza, the train is probably late—it is so very warm—" He broke off as he spoke, turning and looking across the garden to his right. "It seems I hear wheels even now," he murmured, "but my ears are bad."

Donna Mabel rose excitedly. "Your ears are right for once, good old man," she declared kindly, "it is the carriage. Run, Arrigo, and see that everything is ready for him."

Tying her absurd sunbonnet under her chin she ran along the upper terrace to the garden wall and leaned over it.

A carriage was struggling up the last steep bit of the ascent, almost completely hidden by a cloud of saffron-colored dust.

Convinced that her expected guest really was arriving, Donna Mabel went down the steps at the junc-

tion of the terrace and the wall, where she stood, and ran back through the garden as lightly as if she had been a young girl.

Crossing the cool dark hall of the villa, she went out into the little courtyard on its farther side and stood by the gilded iron gates which the gardener was then opening.

The carriage lumbered in and stopped.

"Well, Mother—"

"You dear, *dear* boy!"

Hugh Gunning kissed her affectionately and then held her out at arm's length and looked at her.

"Prettier than ever," he said.

"Nonsense! But come in out of the heat. How dreadfully dusty you are. It's a good thing you have not come to marry *me*; I should be afraid of such a great untidy person!"

"The journey has been fearful. I'll have a wash at once, if I may, and then we'll talk."

"Arrigo has gone to draw your bath."

"Good."

Half an hour later they sat together in the greenish light of the brick-floored drawing room, Gunning drinking tea like a true Briton, his mother sipping at an iced drink of a rich crimson color.

"And now tell me all about it. The house is quite ready?"

"Yes. Everything is ready. It's a dear old place, Mammina. I was so glad to be able to get the furniture, too, new stuff looks so out of place in an old house, and all this is good. The drawing room is really

exquisite, all delicate spindly things, the walls hung with very faded gray satin brocade, like silver chasing, and even the pictures are deliciously suitable—pastel portraits, for the most part. It was a great bit of luck, wasn't it?"

"It was, indeed. Very dear, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, rather, but so exactly what I wanted for *her*, so absolutely suited to her. Wait till you see her there. I can't believe it even now, mother. It's so extraordinary that she should really care for *me*."

She bridled at the humility of his voice.

"Nonsense, my son. She may consider herself a very fortunate girl to have a husband like you. That's what *I* say. By the way, we dine with them to-night at half-past eight. The girls were here yesterday in colors for the first time, poor dears."

Gunning smiled dreamily to himself. "What did she wear?" he asked, ignoring the very existence of the other two.

Donna Mabel clapped her hands.

"I knew you'd ask, so I took particular mental notes. Palest pink it was, and a silver gray hat, and one of those long chiffon scarfs, also silver gray. She looked very beautiful. She has her hair parted in the middle now and bunched up on her neck—she sat in that chair where you are and went to sleep after tea."

"Poor darling, she *does* go to sleep so easily! I fear she is not very strong, mother."

"Nonsense, she's simply appallingly indolent. She never worries about anything and very rarely reads.

•

She'll never lose her looks, at any rate; these placid women don't. I met her in the Poggio a few weeks ago; she had on a Greek-shaped thing, a sort of tea-gown, and upon my word, one would have said one of the statues had come down from her pedestal for a little—a little *very* gentle exercise. She will set all London by the ears, Hughie."

"I shan't take her much to London," he returned, with the calm assumption of future all-wise authority common to engaged men. "She has never been and she wouldn't like it."

Donna Mabel poured out more tea for him, a doubtful smile on her kind, rather silly little face.

"You think so? Si vedrà. I had a letter from Lady Corisande Peplow the other day. She is very angry with Mr. Lambe for allowing the girl to marry before she has 'tasted blood.'"

"Faugh! Nasty expression. The truth is, Mother, no one but me understands Sylvia. She is so wonderful to look at that people get no further. Her mind is really very unusual."

But Donna Mabel, though silly, was shrewd in some ways, and even her maternal patience could not stand an elucidation of Sylvia Lambe's soul.

"It's nearly seven now, Ugolino mio," she said, rising, "and the drive is long. I must go and put on my war-paint. Can you be ready at ten minutes before eight?"

He opened and closed the door for her with just a little more ceremony than he would have shown had his bringing-up been strictly English. Then he

walked restlessly about the long narrow room, his hands behind him.

The room was attractive, though very shabby, for Donna Mabel hated new things and clung almost piteously to things her beautiful young Italian husband had lived among.

The chintz, therefore, was very faded, and everything looked old-fashioned, though nothing was really old.

There were three pictures of the late Marquis, one a badly done oil portrait of him at about sixteen, a bold, handsome boy with thick, clustered curls, and the other two were photographs. These stood on Donna Mabel's writing-table and showed him as he had been at the time of the marriage—one very dashing in cavalry uniform, the other in ultra-British clothes, a bulldog by his side.

"Poor little Madre," said Gunning aloud, as he stood looking at those two. His mother was very dear to him. In the year that had passed since the journey hither from England with the Lambes his face had changed very markedly. He looked much older, but stronger and more decided than before, though strength and decision had, even in his boyhood, been his greatest characteristics.

It was a wonderfully happy face, but grave with the gravity of one who carries in his breast the greatest treasure in the world. His love for Sylvia was to him a kind of consecration and his face shone with its light. Not many men are capable of love such as he gave to Sylvia; from his earliest youth she had been

his ideal, his mind had never wavered from the thought of her; he had had no flirtations, no fancies, he had never been "taken in hand" by a married woman. Since that night when he had found the Lambe children adrift in the boat, he had loved Sylvia, and now that their wedding day was close at hand the result, if not the reward, of his constancy was an exaltation of soul such as comparatively few young men can know.

It was almost as if he were a very devout youth about to attain his coronation of priesthood.

Hugh Gunning was a shy man, even with himself, and never told himself these things; he was not given to self-analysis. But the feelings that surged in his heart that evening as his mother drove him down the long hill to Lambe's villa were of an exceedingly devotional nature.

"Let me see," reflected Donna Mabel aloud, "how long is it since you saw your Super girl?"

"Five months," he answered simply, seeing no wrong in the nickname. "They have been long months, too."

"You'll find all the girls changed. Sylvia is lovelier than ever, Susan is more—I don't quite know how to express it—somber is as near a word as any, and Daffy has improved in character. She would be plainish, even in an ordinary family, poor child."

"Yes, she is certainly not pretty. Good figure, though, hasn't she?"

"Y-yes; too thin, but very upright and strong-looking. I never liked her much. Susan is the one I



see the most of. She seemed to take to me from the very first, you may remember. She comes up to the villa very often and plays to me. Her music is wonderful, but stormy—yes, very stormy. I don't think she's happy."

"Isn't she?" asked Gunning indifferently as the pony carriage clattered across the piazza of the town. "I am sorry."

They turned sharply to the left and during the rapid passage through streets so narrow that a grown person could easily have touched the houses on both sides, the silence was unbroken, save by the warning cry Donna Mabel uttered in imitation of cab drivers as they rounded corners.

"Here we are, Ugolino!" She glanced swiftly at him as she spoke. His sternly set face was very pale, and as the big gates swung to behind them he bit his lip nervously.

## CHAPTER XXII

**W**HILE Gunning was on his way to his mother's house that afternoon Susan Lambe was walking all by herself along the road leading south from Sorrento. This in itself was an unusual circumstance, and that something had just happened or was just about to happen was evident from the expression on the girl's face.

She had developed and matured in the year that had elapsed since she came to Italy as if the warm sun had ripened her, and she was now a strikingly handsome young woman, rather than a pretty girl, although she was only eighteen.

She wore a short dark skirt and a well-cut white silk shirt and a mannish Panama hat, and she walked very swiftly along the dusty sunburnt road.

The heat wilted Sylvia and made her sleepier than usual. It stimulated Susan.

After about half an hour of rapid motion she came to a path leading directly to the sea. At the foot of the path, which was very narrow and diversified by steps every now and then, was a small bay from which extended into the water an iron pier. Off the end of the pier a long white auxiliary yacht was moored.

It was very warm indeed close to the tideless sea,

and the only human being in sight was a fisherman, who lay on the sand on his face, sound asleep.

Susan hesitated, then opening a rose-colored parasol that she had brought with her, walked slowly past the sleeper across the sands.

When she reached the rocks that barred her further progress she stood looking seaward from under the fringe of her parasol. The yacht lay on the bright water like a painted ship; not a sign of life on her.

Slowly Susan walked back to the pier and again paused. The heat was terrific and even she began to feel it.

However, she had come for a set though vague purpose and meant to accomplish it if it proved accomplishable. Back she went, twirling the parasol as if she were trying to attract some one's attention. When she again stood by the pier the fisherman awoke and rolled over.

"Buon giorno," she said politely, "I hope I didn't disturb your siesta."

The man smiled courteously and sat up.

"No, signora—but you—you do not feel the heat? It is bad enough for us others, but for you—"

"I like heat," she returned carelessly, "and am used to it. I thought it might be cooler here."

"But no, at this time it is hottest of all close to the sea. My gentleman all sleep on the yacht."

Susan looked at the graceful thing at the end of the pier.

"Your signore is the tall gentleman who wears white?"

"Si, signora. You know him?" the man added with interest so very different from offensive curiosity that seems to be a specialty of the Latin races.

Susan shook her head. "No. I do not even know his name. But I wish to see him. It is very important—to him, not to me."

The man's eyes sparkled suddenly.

"The signora has perhaps news of his dog. Ah, Madonna, but he will be glad!"

Susan disliked lying, but she hedged now. "Their siesta must be nearly over," she said, looking at her watch, which hung from her neck on a delicate pearl chain. "Will you go and tell your signore that I wish to speak to him?"

Calmly she eyed the astonished fisherman, knowing well that a show of unquestioned authority usually attains its end.

"But, signora, I tell the Signor Duca anything? I am only old Benvenuto the fisherman; I do not belong to the yacht. Something is wrong with the yacht's dingy and that's why I bring the signore to and from the yacht in my old *Stella d'Italia*"—he made a sign toward a clumsy red fishing boat fastened at the pierhead. "I cannot go on board and demand an audience with the Signor Duca!"

Susan took her purse from her belt.

"No, but you can go to the steward and tell him this: 'There is a lady on the beach who must speak to the Signor Duca at once.' Go and tell him it is the lady he saw yesterday afternoon in church. That you can tell the steward."

'A ten lire piece flashed in her open palm and Benvenuto il Pescatore drew a deep breath.

"Ebbene, signora, I will go. The steward may tell me to go to the devil—your servant!—but I can try."

Susan sat down on the edge of the pier.

"Go at once and when I have seen the steward with you on the deck I shall know you have done what I told you and you shall have the money."

The man smiled in unwilling admiration of her prudence and started off along the pier, his red cap pulled down over his eyes.

Susan sat quite still till she had seen him board the yacht. Then she walked to the edge of the sea and stood looking out over the water from a place whence from the yacht she was plainly visible.

First the white figure of the steward came on deck with the fisherman, and then after further parley the fisherman went down over the side and sat leaning on his oars. It seemed that the Duke, whoever he might be, was not asleep, for Benvenuto was obviously awaiting him.

Presently a very tall man came to the rail and gazed eagerly landward. Susan lowered her parasol for a moment, but when he produced a glass she again concealed her head and walked slowly on toward the rocks.

When she peeped through the parasol fringe on turning, the boat had nearly reached the pier and there were two men in it.

"Signora—"

She could see his neat white flannels up to the knees, but her parasol she kept obstinately lowered.

"May I not beg you," the musical voice went on respectfully.

Then she dropped the parasol and looked up. At the acute disappointment in his face she burst out laughing.

"I know," she said rapidly, "you hoped it was my sister. Well, I meant you to think so. Will you—will you come to the shade somewhere so that we can talk?"

It is probable that Don Gianfranco di Ginestra was disappointed on seeing that for whatever reason this eccentric miss had sought him, she was as indubitably a lady as she was eccentric.

True, he had never doubted the original social standing of the sisters since he had first seen them, but on hearing from his unmoved steward that one of the two was on the beach awaiting him, a faint hope had inevitably sprung up in his mind that perhaps—he hardly knew what.

He followed Susan up a steep path among olive trees in perfect silence and when she at last paused, leaning against a gnarled silver-gray giant of a tree, he bent his head and stood waiting.

"Will you tell me your name?" she began abruptly, panting a little from excitement as well as from the steepness of the ascent.

"My name is Gianfranco, Duca di Ginestra—at your service."

"And I am Miss Susan Lambe of Villa 'Acquadolce.'"

He started. "Ah!"

Her frankness was to him at once satisfactory and disconcerting.

"Yes, and—we did not see each other yesterday for the first time."

"No. It was over a year ago on the Dover-Calais boat. I—I had not forgotten, signorina."

Susan studied his face, which was an extremely emotional one.

"You mean that you had not forgotten my sister Sylvia."

"Sylvia," he repeated softly, his eyes widening. "Sylvia—yes—I mean that. She is too beautiful to forget."

With a satisfied nod Susan went on speaking.

"Well—you are a gentleman and I a lady, so I will be quite frank and you will forgive my frankness and keep my confidence."

He bowed in silence. Her broken, fluent Italian was very pretty, but he did not notice it. Her voice might have been that of a crow for all the effect it had on him.

"Are you married?" she asked him.

"No, signorina."

"Fidanzata?"

He pointed to the sea. "Signorina, I am not engaged. The blue water there is not freer than I, thank God."

"Good. Then—you have fallen in love with my sister. She is twenty years old, she is rich, and—you have seen her. She has never been into society, she

has never been in a city, even, for more than a day at a time. She is a child. I am nineteen, but I am practically years older than she. Would you like to—marry her?"

Poor Gianfranco, he was as conventional-minded and unromantic as most Italians of his class and manner of education. Nowadays many young Italians have English or American blood, which modifies the Latin in them to an extraordinary degree, but the Ginestra were pure-blooded Italians and Gianfranco's recently dead parents had been of the most intransigent type.

In the natural course of events a wife would have been chosen for him, thirty-four years old though he was, by his relatives, and he would have accepted her as docilely as if he had lived in the fifteenth century. A man's romances are his own, his wife is his family's.

And here was a young English miss offering him her sister.

It was unheard of and had great possibilities of shocking him, but he was not shocked.

The reason was not far to seek and the shrewd Susan had counted on it from the first. He had seen Sylvia. From the day a year ago when his eyes first fell on her on the boat he had remembered her, and when the day before he had come suddenly face to face with her in the old dusky church into which he had wandered through sheer lack of anything more entertaining to do, his heart had given a great leap, and he told himself that he was in love.

But Susan was very puzzling.



"Signorina," he said haltingly, "you do me very great honor, but—your father, your mother? And besides, the young lady does not know me—"

Susan held out her hand as a sign that she wished to speak.

"Our mother is dead. Our father never objects to things. But the chief point is this: Sylvia saw you yesterday and—well, she admired you. She is a very strange girl, but I know her well. We talked of you afterward and—Oh, well, I *know*. We called you 'The Corsair,' " she concluded in English.

When she tried to explain to him what a Corsair was she failed utterly, but he gathered the impression that she meant to convey. Sylvia had observed him and been struck by him.

His pale face flushed. "If you think I might get some one to introduce me to your signor father," he began, but she shook her head.

"That of course later, but I want her to see you at once. She is romantic, of course. All girls are. And you," she cast a comprehensive gaze over him, "*look* romantic, whether you are or not."

Ginestra shrugged his shoulders.

"But I cannot speak to her if I do not present myself to your father," he protested.

Susan stamped her foot. "O Dio!" she moaned.

Gianfranco watched her politely. She was indeed very strange. But in his way he was rather wise, so he waited. He was in love with Sylvia and the knowledge that she was well born, and rich as well as beautiful, was naturally no damper to his ardor.

And when presently he found Susan unfolding to him the plan she had made, he agreed to it all. She was a master spirit and he was not, so he could follow her without any hurt to his vanity, which in any case was not very great.

As they parted he said suddenly:

"That is *her* parasol!"

She laughed.

"Exactly. I borrowed it as a lure! Well, *a riverderci*, and remember what I have told you."

"Signorina, never fear, I shall remember!"

Then he went back to his yacht and Susan emerged a few minutes later from the little olive grove on to the blazing highroad.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**W**HEN Donna Mabel and her son arrived at the villa, Lambe met them at the door. Time had made him and Donna Mabel very good friends. He had learned to value her in spite of her bouts of meddlesomeness, and she, assimilating little by little the fact that he was utterly unmanageable, had latterly given up her attempts. She was not one of those few people who give up a comfortably rooted bad habit, but she directed what she quite wrongly considered her talents in another direction. She was now busy managing a young couple who had settled near Castellamare and whose coming baby afforded great scope to her ideas.

Lambe shook hands cordially with his prospective son-in-law, whom he liked, and told him that he would find the girls in the Poggio.

Then gently but relentlessly he led Donna Mabel indoors and removed the tan colored driving coat with which she had covered her evening finery.

"They're all in the drawing room, except Sylvia," he said. "No good in embarrassing her and Hughie."

"I am sorry. I wished to see the meeting."

"No doubt you did, but you are not to. The gods—meaning myself—have settled otherwise. Susan, here's Donna Mabel."

But it was Daffy who rose from her chair in one of the balconies and came forward to greet the guest.

"Susan went into the garden a minute ago," she explained.

Daffy had not grown much. She was still small and thin, but her figure, as Gunning had predicted, was good, and her movements more graceful than those of either of her sisters. She wore a well-cut white gown that made the most of these advantages, and in her waistband she had stuck a bunch of some very heavy-scented white flowers.

"Hasn't Hughie come?" she asked as Donna Mabel perched on the balustrade of the balcony.

"Yes. He had gone to the Poggio to find Sylvia."

Daffy knew many things about Donna Mabel. She knew that the little lady adored the memory of her second husband, but that she was supposed, nevertheless, to have done her best to secure a third one in the shape of Christopher Lambe. Daffy almost knew that Donna Mabel's mental attitude had been one of absolute loyalty to her poor Livio, and that the projected marriage, had she been able to compass it, would have been entirely one of convenience and a longing for human companionship.

Moreover, the youngest Miss Lambe shrewdly guessed that her parent had been forced to fairly strenuous measures to avert the catastrophe. For several weeks early that winter, Lambe's face had been careworn, his eyes wild, and he had been found concealed on occasions of visits from his pursuer, in distant parts of the garden. Then quite suddenly after

a long *tête-à-tête* in the library, his brow had cleared, his mouth again settled into its comfortable, whimsical lines and Donna Mabel confided to Susan (who told Sylvia, who told Daffy) that nothing could induce her to marry again, that her whole heart was in the grave with her boy's dear stepfather.

Donna Mabel, in two words, was a valorous fool. She did the most insane things, but invariably bore the resultant chastisement with a calm courage that was to the understanding very disarming.

And Daffy, the silent, *was* understanding.

Now, as the two women talked in the unlighted drawing room she knew quite well that Susan, as she put it, had not without some strong motive left her, the unconsidered youngest, to do the honors. Susan was undoubtedly "up to something." Only what it was Daffy could not make out.

For all her observation she was very young, and Susan's changed demeanor during the past year meant to her only that Susan was rather nastier even than before. Susan had kept her secret well.

And as the second Miss Lambe sped noiselessly over the Cascade Bridge and up the steps to the northeast corner of the Poggio, she was congratulating herself on that same fact. It greatly facilitated the accomplishment of her present plot. Sylvia, she knew, would be sitting on a curved marble garden seat, called for obvious reasons the Alma Tadema seat. And behind the Alma Tadema seat was a thick group of lemon trees.

When Hugh Gunning came marching up the path,

his heart on fire with joy at seeing his idol, the idol was indeed sitting where Susan had advised her to go.

"If you don't want him to kiss you that's the best place, for it's in full view of the gardener's cottage, and besides, it's awfully pretty there."

Sylvia, the docile, had been reading, but half an hour before had laid down her book, a badly printed copy of Byron, and as was her custom dropped gently to sleep.

She wore white and in her hair was an old gold fillet of beautiful design, sent her by Gunning for her birthday.

The sound of his footsteps awoke her and she rose, dropping the book on the marble step with a crash.

Gunning paused for a moment when he first saw her, and then, very swiftly and quietly for such a heavy man, rushed to her and took her into his arms. He was very gentle, but he ruffled her hair and crushed her winglike sleeves.

"You are spoiling my frock," she said with a sweet smile, quite unmoved by his vehemence or by the fact she stated. As a matter of fact, love-making bored her.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," he stammered, drawing her back to the seat and sitting down, "forgive me if I am rough. I—I haven't seen you for so long!"

Sylvia's sweetness was quite unaffected. She was the gentlest creature in the world and it is unfair to blame her for having no mind. Gunning, who had no idea that she had no mind, would not have blamed her for murder, so perfect was she in his eyes. He laid

his big brown hand gently on her two little ones that lay clasped on her lap.

"Sylvia, tell me it's true—true, that we are to be married in ten days! I—I can't believe it somehow."

She smiled. "It is quite true, silly old boy. And now we must go in to dinner. How do you like being an M. P?"

They walked slowly down the path, a splendid looking couple, had any one been there to see them, but the only witness of their interview had crept away down the steps and was speeding back to the house by way of the tunnel and the heliotrope garden.

Susan Lambe's beautiful face was none the less beautiful for the unlovely thoughts behind it, and no one but Daffy particularly noticed her entrance into the drawing room, which took place shortly before that of her sister and Gunning.

"Been in the Cascade Garden, haven't you?" Daffy asked, looking up from her music with an expressionless face. Susan glanced at her not quite pleasantly.

"No, what makes you think so?"

"Sand on your shoes, that's all."

Sylvia dutifully kissed Donna Mabel's scented cheek and they went in to dinner.

Christopher Lambe had, to every one's amazement, done his duty nobly by his motherless girls; late in the previous June, he had taken them to Switzerland and together they had walked and climbed and gone on lakes in small and perilous boats. And only once had his old absent-mindedness manifested itself, and as it even then consisted only of walking out of an inn by

the back door and going home without them, no harm was done.

Once two young men had threatened to attach themselves to his party, but he speedily disposed of them by a method he confided only to Daffy, who for days afterward used to burst into fits of suppressed chuckles over it.

Gründorf was a remote and lonely village and their seclusion was not again molested all summer.

In October they returned to the villa and here Sylvia and Daffy had been ever since.

Lady Corisande, determined on bringing Sylvia out, met with a flat refusal. Sylvia was going to be married and did not wish to go to London. This amazing fact was confirmed by the girl herself, so there was no more to be done, but on Susan's suggesting herself as second-best, her aunt decided to accept her proposal and away went Susan to Paris shortly after Christmas and thence to Manchester Square where the Peplows had a house.

London was to Susan's taste for two reasons. The first was that Hugh Gunning was in town, the second that she heard much good music there. The beautiful Miss Lambe, as in Sylvia's absence she instantly became, was much fêted, but her mind was possessed—almost obsessed—by Gunning and music.

Unlike most young girls, social distractions had absolutely no power to turn her attention from the man who loved her sister and the art she had made to a certain extent hers.

Gunning came fairly often to Manchester Square,



for he thirsted for news from Italy and Sylvia's semi-occasional letters were far from satisfying.

And Susan did all in her power to attract him. It is always impossible to say what any given person would do in any given circumstances. It is therefore out of the question to say what Susan Lambe would have done if Sylvia had loved Hugh Gunning.

Without a doubt Susan loved her sister, so it may be that she would have played fair. On the other hand she loved herself more than she loved any one on earth, she was fearless even before her own conscience, and he enjoyed being with Susan, who never tired him with chatter and whose music he loved.

Lady Corisande, very busy herself, noticed nothing, but Uncle Fred used to wonder. He distrusted his niece.

Thus the winter wore away and spring came, and Susan saw that all her work was in vain. Gunning liked her but he adored Sylvia.

Then for a fortnight Susan Lambe dashed comet-like into the firmament of London society, and all eyes were on her. She dressed well and in a style all her own, and her desperate gaiety lured several men to a fall, to Aunt Corisande's mingled pride and annoyance. She was certainly a strange niece to chaperon, and Aunt Corisande was not altogether sorry to see the last of her.

Toward the end of May, Gunning, who had made two hurried visits to Sorrento during the winter, announced that Sylvia had consented to be married in June or July.

Susan sat at the piano and listened quietly without a word. But a few days later she went home. That night of his arrival, Gunning who sat opposite her, said suddenly after studying her face for a moment:

“Aren’t you well, Susan?”

“Perfectly, my dear Hughie, why?”

“You look—well, I don’t know—not quite yourself,” he returned doubtfully.

Susan laughed, but in her mind she raged.

“If I blow my brains out at his feet,” she thought furiously, “his one idea would be to keep Sylvia from the shock of seeing me!”

She was as near hate as love at that moment.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**A**T half-past eleven that night, Susan came into Sylvia's room in a dressing gown.

"Sylvia, dear, may I come in? I have such an awful head. Are you in bed?"

No, Sylvia was not in bed. She had a way of dawdling for an hour over the evening rites and now she had not even taken off her frock. She was sitting on her balcony, a book in her hand, but her eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Come in, dear. I am so sorry your head is bad. There's eau de cologne on the dressing table. Make a cold bandage."

Susan did so and sat down. "Oh, dear," she yawned, "what a boring evening."

"Did you think so?" asked Sylvia simply.

"I most decidedly did, didn't you?"

"No. I am never bored, you know. I thought it was all very pleasant."

"Oh, well, you had your best beloved with you. Poor old Hughie, he certainly doesn't add to the gaiety of nations."

Sylvia mused for a moment, her slow brain really striving for something.

"Do you think Hughie dull, Susan?" she asked.

Susan was wary, and advanced slowly.

"My dear Sylvia, what does it matter what *I* think? *I'm* not going to marry him!"

But Sylvia, though slow, was possessed of a certain persistency.

"But *do* you think him dull?" she repeated after a pause.

"Yes I do, if you will have it. But he's a dear old thing, just the same, and besides—well, darling, you aren't over lively yourself, are you, you blessed dormouse!"

But Sylvia had a sensitive point and this touched it. "Quiet people aren't all stupid," she retorted, almost sharply for her.

Susan was silent.

"Susan, I say, all quiet people aren't stupid."

"No, according to Kipling the elephant's the cleverest of all beasts and he is called 'The Silent!'"

Sylvia moved uneasily in her chair. "I know you think Hughie is good enough for me because I'm not clever," she declared with a flash of vehemence. "You think I'm too dull for any one else!"

"Silly Sylvia! That's what you are, goosie. No; but I'll tell you what I do think. I think he isn't nearly good enough, nor handsome enough, nor—anything. There!"

This was very soothing to Sylvia's hurt vanity and she drew a deep breath of relief.

"He's very nice, Hughie. And as I suppose I must marry, it's nice to marry a real old friend. He won't expect me to talk much, or to read newspapers, or to stay awake when I'm sleepy."

Susan rose. "No. He'll be asleep himself. However, never mind Hughie. Are you very sleepy now, dear? Too sleepy to go down to the lower terrace, and get a little air? I should like to, if you don't mind coming."

No, Sylvia did not mind. She almost never minded anything.

Susan put a cloak over her dressing gown, and Sylvia took a long white scarf and the two girls went quietly downstairs and out into the garden. As they reached the steps Susan stopped.

"Just listen to the singing well, how clearly it sounds in the silence!"

The soft gurgling of the well at the breakfast place in the pergola sounded almost like a deep chuckle in the night. It was very still. Far up the hill at the back of the Poggio a nightingale sang. Moonlight lay faint on the sea, but the sky looked ragged and rather threatening.

"'On such a night as this,'" said Susan, and Sylvia smiled——

"Go on, from Romeo and Juliet, isn't it?"

Susan corrected her and recited a few lines of the scene. "I wish," she added as they went down the steps, "that I had a splendid romantic lover and that he was coming to meet me down by the sea."

"Why, Susan!" Sylvia was surprised.

"Yes. A dark, mysterious man with black eyes, and an impassioned voice." Mentally, Susan made a face at herself, at her own words, but they were the words to arrest Sylvia's attention.

"Go on, Susan," she begged like a child.

"He should be dark because I am fair, and he should have a secret grief until he saw me, of course. And he should have rather long hair; curly. Heavens," she warmed up, "how he would worship me!"

Sylvia twisted one end of her scarf. "He's isn't a bit like Hughie," she said, in rather a troubled voice.

"Like Hughie, indeed, I should think not! He'd be like no one you ever saw, so beautiful and so mysterious."

"Rather like that man we saw in the church yesterday. Do you remember, Susan?"

Susan hesitated. "In the church? Oh, yes, I know. Yes, very like him. He is a Duke, Sylvia. Old Margarita told me."

Sylvia had not learned a word of Italian during her year's stay in Sorrento, so it was perfectly safe for Susan to pretend to derive her knowledge from the lodge-keeper's wife.

"A Duke, is he? He is very handsome. Rather like the Corsair, we decided last night, didn't we?"

"We did," assented Susan. "He's here with his yacht. I remember now to have seen him before, by the way. On the boat from Dover to Calais. He sat near us and stared."

"Did he? I didn't see him; I suppose I was asleep."

"Yes, you were. It's rather interesting that he should turn up here, isn't it?"

Sylvia thought it was. "I wonder if he has a secret grief," she mused. Then she yawned. "How's your head, Susan? I'd like to go to bed."

They were leaning on a marble balustrade; behind them was the cliff, a few feet below them the sea.

Susan looked seaward in silence for a moment.

"Oh, Sylvia, it's a good thing you are a dormouse," she burst out, "for if you weren't, Hugh Gunning would bore you to desperation. His hands are so big and so brown, and he is *so* tiresome. I do wish you had waited, there are so many charming men in London, or even here in Italy, I suppose. However, it's too late now. Think of the Corsair, for instance. What if he came along and fell madly in love with you, you'd have to say you were sorry, but you'd promised to marry Hughie! Why even Aunt Corisande used to go out of the room when he came to see me, he bored her so."

Now Sylvia was simple and she was not at all vain of her beauty, but she had from her childhood been used to having the best of everything. She did not reason about it, or know that she owed this privilege to her beauty, but the fact itself was very apparent to her.

And Hugh Gunning, the adored big playmate of their childhood, had been to her naturally the best thing in the man line. She did not love him, but she would have been very annoyed had he chosen either of her sisters instead of herself. She had accepted him as she would have accepted the best of three bouquets or three seats in a train. He was the best, so he was for her. And here was Susan, the second Miss Lambe, actually scorning him! Sylvia stirred uneasily, her little characteristic wriggle of discomfort.

"I thought you liked him," she protested.

"I do. I am very fond of him. But he's not good enough for you, and now it's too late."

As she spoke, Ginestra's skiff shot round the rocks into view.

Sylvia started. "Oh, Susan look!"

"One of the fishermen, I suppose."

"Susan, it isn't, it's *him*!"

Susan leaned over the balustrade. "The Corsair! Talk of the—don't let him see you, Sylvia."

But Sylvia did not move. Her eyes were fixed on the really romantic looking figure in the boat.

Ginestra pulled in his oars and touched a guitar that lay in the boat. Then, very softly, he began to sing. It was all banal, cheap, theatrical. Beyond the fact that the man really was in love, it was too banal, too cheap, too theatrical for any real poignancy of effect, but—Susan knew her audience—poor Sylvia was enthralled. To her it appealed strongly.

"Isn't it *divine*?" she whispered, "how handsome he is!"

"Superb. And what a voice. Sylvia, isn't it queer that I should just have been wishing for—for—an adventure?"

Sylvia did not answer.

"He must have asked who I was," went on Susan, "in fact, old Margarita said he stopped and talked to her, and now he's serenading me!"

Sylvia's sweet expression changed suddenly to one of childish sulkiness.



"How do you know it's *you*?"

"Because, oh, now really! You are going to be married in ten days to your entrancing Hughie, no poaching!" Susan was clever, but Sylvia had a sledge-hammer logic of her own.

"*He* doesn't know I'm going to be married," she answered.

"Hush, he'll hear you."

Ginestra sang on and on. He had a pretty, light tenor voice and used it fairly well, in a natural way. Susan listened and watched her sister. She had succeeded. Sylvia's jealousy of possession was aroused. Ginestra might have come for her sister, but she was the eldest, she was Sylvia, and if she wanted him, then he should have come for her.

"How could he know I am engaged?" she whispered sharply.

"He might have asked Margarita, I suppose?"

"He's nice and tall, too," said Sylvia, after a pause. "He looks like a Greek God."

This delectable comparison she had culled from the pages of some novel. There was nothing in the least Greek about Gianfranco di Ginestra. Under the hood of her cloak, Susan grinned. She felt very kindly toward her sister just then. Sylvia's very silliness was endearing in a way.

That what she was doing, if it succeeded, would nearly break Hugh Gunning's heart, did not matter to her. He would suffer, she knew, but in his pain she meant him to turn to her. And then, to do the girl justice, there was nothing in the world, except give

him up and help him to be happy in his own way, that she would not have done for Gunning.

If he had become suddenly penniless, suddenly a social pariah, she would have married him and worked herself to death for him. So much of good there was in her. In her thoughts she was comforting him for the loss of Sylvia, when the music ceased and she came to herself with a start.

Ginestra laid down his guitar, rose in the boat, and with a quick movement of his arm, threw something up over the balustrade.

Sylvia, the sluggish, stooped like a flash and picked it up. It was a large, fat, crimson rose hardly out of the bud.

"Give it to me," cried Susan, as the boat, its occupant gazing back at them, sped away into the shadow.

"I won't give it to you, Susan," Sylvia laid the rose against her cheek and drew away from her sister. "I caught it and it's mine."

"Oh, very well," returned Susan with much majesty of demeanor. "Just as you like. But I must say, for a girl who is going to be married a week from Thursday—I wonder what your beloved Hughie would say!"

Sylvia followed her nearly to the top of the steps in complete silence. Then she spoke with a dogged note in her voice that Susan had heard only once or twice in life.

"I don't care what 'you must say,' and I don't care what Hughie says. The Corsair meant the rose for me, so it's mine and I'm going to keep it."

They parted without further conversation, and when

Susan had locked her door, she sank into a chair completely exhausted. Mental suggestion is a tiring thing to exercise. But Susan, though tired to death, was more than satisfied with her evening's work. "Poor old Sylvia," she thought affectionately, "what a duffer she is, and yet what a dear!"

## CHAPTER XXV

“FATHER, what’s the matter?”

It was the day following the serenade, and Lambe was sitting in the grotto leading from the library when Daffy came in.

He started guiltily and rose from where he had been sitting with his elbows on the base of the unglassed archways that were windows in all but glass.

“The matter, Daffy? Nothing, my dear, why?”

Daffy jumped up to the ledge, a rather difficult matter to her, she was so little, and folded her hands on her lap.

“Oh, yes there is,” she insisted, disregarding his question. “There’s been something the matter for ages. Father, won’t you tell me?”

Lambe’s face suddenly went all over wrinkles as he smiled at her and his small eyes nearly disappeared like a face in a slate under slashing scratches of the pencil.

“Good, Daffy! Well, I’ll tell you, only mum’s the word. Go-Fever, my son-daughter. A bad attack of it.” She nodded.

“I thought so. Well, after the wedding you must call in the doctors.”

“What doctors?”

“Dr. Change, assisted by Mr. Distance. Poor

father, being the heavy parent for so long. Where will you go?"

Now Lambe, who had deserted his blameless wife and his three little girls without a qualm, had felt as guilty as a murderer under the urgings of his old restless spirit to leave even for a few months his three grown girls. It may have been because he knew them better than he had known his wife, or because he felt that the queer detached pride they caused him claimed the recompense of his continued presence. He himself could not explain it, but he had really struggled against his Go-Fever, and Daffy's advice was a great consolation to him.

"You don't think it would be bad cricket?" he asked boyishly. "I *should* like a—a——"

"Holiday?" suggested Daffy gravely, and he nodded.

"I thought a few months in the Swedish mountains, or Canada."

"Why not do both?"

He thrust out his lower lip in conscientious negation.

"Oh, no, I should be back by the first of November." And so it was settled.

Daffy, who loved her father much as some big boys love their mother, patted his shoulder and then went back to her own part of the house where the small Angiolino Screech was waiting for his daily English lesson.

It was a thunderous day, and the great heat still lay almost like something visible over the coast line. Daffy

had been charged by her father to decide where she and Susan and the unpleasing Judd should spend the summer. He had not suggested their inviting some older woman as a chaperon, but Daffy knew that this must be done, under penalty of an incursion of outraged aunts. And she meant to make this decision, as well as the other, before the plan was unfolded to Susan.

Since the girls had what seventeen-year-old Daffy called "grown up," her relations with her second sister had been marked by a greater decorum than hitherto, but it was at best only an armed peace, and meant no kind of companionship to either of them.

"Hello, Hughie!"

As she crossed the hall on her way upstairs, she nearly ran into Gunning, who made a feint of leaping aside to avoid her.

"Don't run over me, you great clumsy thing," he laughed, looking down at her.

The joke was an old one, but she enjoyed it.

"Look here, Hughie, I want your advice. Only you mustn't tell a soul."

He selected a malmaison from a bowl that stood on the table and drew its stem carefully through his button hole.

"All right, I won't. What is it?"

"Well, father is going for a holiday, for one thing."

Over Gunning's happy face a quick frown passed.

"A holiday from what?"

"From *us*. Don't be silly, Hughie. And Susan and

I are to go somewhere, with some one. I am to decide where and the one."

"H'm."

"Yes. Father seems to think Switzerland, but I'd rather like to go somewhere else for a change."

She looked very childish in her little blue frock standing there in the big hall.

"One of your aunts," he suggested vaguely.

"Or Donna Mabel. Do you think she'd go?"

Donna Mabel was not greatly beloved, but she had certain qualities appreciated by Daffy. For instance, her habit of getting up late and taking a long nap every afternoon."

"Where is Sylvia?" he asked, before he answered her question.

"In the pergola. Well, do you think she would—I mean, do you think Donna Mabel would go?"

They went out into the sun and turned into the shade of the first pergola.

"I don't know, she might. But she's not a good chaperon, my mother, she's too vague. Upon my word, now one comes to think of it, you are all vague here in Sorrento! I believe it's something in the air."

"Father and Sylvia and I were born vague," she laughed, "but I'm better than I used to be, don't you think?"

He stood still and in a brotherly way took her pointed chin in his hand and looked into her eyes.

"Yes, I do think so, Daffy," his voice was a trifle sententious, but his thought was very kind. "And better in other ways, too. You're a funny little thing,

but I do believe you never forgot your—your vow the night of your mother's funeral."

Up her smooth brown cheeks crept a dark blush.

"Oh, Hughie, no, of course I haven't forgotten it. How could I? It was so *awful* in the dark in the churchyard. The wind howled so and—" she broke off with a genuine shudder.

"Do you ever tell lies now?" he went on down-rightly.

Then she laughed. "Yes, sometimes, don't you? But—Oh, Hughie, I *do* try and it gets easier. I never tell important ones now. Funny! It's easier to tell the truth about hard things than about quite silly little ones."

They walked slowly on, his head nearly touching the tangle of creepers above it. After a minute he asked her again: "And are you still afraid of things?"

She hung her head. "Yes, Hughie. I shall always be a coward. I—I just can't help it. When your mother drives those awful ponies down that awful hill, I always have to get out and walk. And if I try to sleep without a light, I wake up screaming with nightmare. It's no use!"

Her ruefulness was funny, but he did not laugh. Instead he patted her shoulder kindly and then as they reached the open space where the other pergola joined the one they were in, he changed the subject. A canvas tent, its sides rolled up, stood in the breakfast place now, and long chairs with green linen pillows. The stone table was covered with books and papers. In one of the chairs sat Sylvia, writing a letter.



"Another present, Hughie," she said, "from the Vicar. I am thanking him for it."

Gunning could not have looked more gratified if she had announced that she was doing a miracle.

"But you look tired, darling," he said, capturing her left hand.

"My head aches. It's so hot," she answered him.

"Where's Susan?" Daffy put in, opening a book and throwing it down again. Susan's absence seemed strange to her.

Since meeting Susan an hour or so before she had felt more strongly than ever that her second sister was up to something. There had been a look in Susan's face before she knew herself observed.

"I don't know. I haven't seen her this morning."

Gunning frowned. "Has she been annoying you, my beloved?" he asked. Daffy suppressed what can only be termed a grin.

But Sylvia raised plaintive eyebrows.

"No, no, oh, no," she said sweetly, and Gunning was convinced that only her nobility of character prevented a revelation of black crime about Susan. Sylvia was not consciously deceitful. Susan's deliberate avoidance of her all day had really hurt her, and she really felt the plaintiveness her face expressed.

At that moment Susan came down the dusky thick-set pergola behind them, and, with a casual "good morning," sat down.

"Anything wrong, Susan?"

Gunning looked very grim, grimmer than he felt, poor fellow, on that day of all days.

"Wrong?"

"Yes. Sylvia says she hasn't seen you before and it's now eleven o'clock."

Susan arched her nearly black brows in comic amazement.

"Dear me, what a crime! But why is it my crime more than hers? I hope when I have a lover he will mentally draw and quarter every one he fancies is not worshipping me."

"I don't know what you mean," returned Gunning impatiently, "but you hurt your sister. She didn't say so, but one could see."

Susan burst into rather harsh laughter.

"Heavens, Hughie, how boring you are. I think I'll go for a swim. This is too dull to suit me."

She sauntered off, Sylvia watching her.

"Oh, Hughie, now you've sent her away! You are so silly. She'll go down on the beach and bathe!"

Sylvia looked at him reproachfully, and Daffy came to the rescue.

"If she's going to bathe, it stands to reason she will go to the beach, Sylvia! Why shouldn't she?"

Sylvia bit her lip and went on writing. Presently Susan came back from the house, her bathing dress and a cloak over her arm, and disappeared down the steps leading to the lower terrace as well as to the beach.

Sylvia threw down her pen. "It is a horrid day," she said slowly. "I think I'll go for a swim, too."

Gunning rose. "A good idea. Come along, Daffy." But Sylvia shook her head.

"No, don't come, you two. I—I want to talk to Susan."

Gunning looked disappointed. "All right, dear. But don't apologize to Susan for what *she's* done, dearest. You are far too patient with her moods and she was very nasty just now. I can't understand her at all!" As he spoke, however, his face cleared and broke into a smile that was not altogether without the lover's fatuity.

"Or perhaps—yes, poor girl, of course that's it! I am an ass not to have thought of it before. She's *jealous*."

Sylvia put on her hat. "Jealous of whom?" she said vaguely, her eyes on the sea.

"Why, of me, of course! You and she have always been inseparable and—now she resents your—loving me best, my darling angel!"

He had forgotten Daffy, who was studying in the *Sketch* an edifying page of plain women in hideous attitudes, the golf heroines of Great Britain.

Sylvia turned. "I—I beg your pardon," she said, "I didn't hear what you said."

Gunning walked with her to the house, and then came back and sat down. He had not insisted on communicating his discovery to Sylvia. To him, her absent-mindedness had been, not rudeness, but a semi-divine inability to hear anything even remotely derogatory to her sister. He sighed deeply out of pure thanksgiving and then began to read.

Half an hour later Daffy heard footsteps coming

from the house, and looking up saw old Father Gregorio, the parish priest, accompanied by a stranger.

"I say, Hughie, here's Father Gregorio. I do hope he's sober, poor old dear. And who's the other man? I've seen him somewhere."

Before the two callers were within whisper-shot, she added hastily, "Oh, *I* know. It's the man who gave me the wrong bag, do you remember? That day at Calais!"

Father Gregorio introduced his "friend," the Signor Duca di Ginestra. He had come, the old priest, to see il Signor Lamb-a on business. He had hopes of arranging for the Signor Lamb-a the purchase of the peasant Carelli's little olive orchard, and the Signor Duca having expressed a desire to make the acquaintance of the Signor Lamb-a, here they were!

Daffy rang for wine and sweets, and as the old priest had counted on finding him here at his usual place and had not asked for him at the house, Screach was told to inform his master of the arrival of guests.

Ginestra, very handsome indeed in his gay yachting clothes, admired the garden, but tremendously he admired. And the signorina liked it? And the signorina was not lonely in Sorrento? She had no brothers to amuse her? No sisters?

Daffy liked him and at once reminded him of the adventure of the bag. They all laughed a great deal over the account of the sequel.

Presently up the steps came the sound of voices and Sylvia and Susan, wrapped in large burnous like man-

gles of Turkish towelling, appeared under the pergola, their long hair dripping wet.

Ginestra, who sat facing them, rose to his feet.

"Your sisters?" he murmured to Daffy.

Gunning hastened forward to warn the girls of the presence of a stranger, but in some inexplicable way he stumbled over Ginestra's foot, and narrowly escaped a heavy fall, and as he recovered himself he found Sylvia standing alone, just within the lacy shadow of the pergola. "Oh!" she said. Then she turned and followed Susan.

## CHAPTER XXVI

LATER, in recalling that week, Daphne Lambe always felt vaguely to blame in that she had not seen the coming of the catastrophe. She had, she remembered, been indistinctly conscious of a something in the atmosphere, but she had not connected it with Susan.

She had, however, felt for some time that Susan would bear watching, so she did not give a thought to Sylvia, who indeed, to all of them but Susan, seemed quite her usual self.

The house was unusually gay, for Lambe liked the rather solemn Italian, and invited him repeatedly to dine and lunch.

Then there was a three hours' drive along the coast, to a town on the Gulf of Salerno, where they lunched, and a dinner at Donna Mabel's. And in all these mild festivities Ginestra took part as a matter of course.

"He seems to like Susan," Gunning remarked once to Daffy.

"He seems to look more at Sylvia."

"Ah, but who wouldn't? That's natural enough. But he often talks to Susan, you'll notice."

Daffy wished Ginestra would fall in love with Susan, and she said so. "Then I could have father all to myself," she explained, and Gunning understood. He dis-

trusted foreigners as husbands, as most Englishmen do, but Ginestra was undoubtedly a man of good standing and, in spite of his curls and his pallor, there was no denying his good looks, and a certain stiff charm that was his.

"I saw them walking in the Cascade Garden after dinner last night," he reflected; "perhaps it may come to something. She's hard to please, is Susan. One or two nice fellows seemed to like her in London and she wouldn't look at them."

Daffy nodded. "She'd make a goodish Duchess, even if it were only an Italian one."

Meantime, Susan, Sylvia and Ginestra were in the girls' sitting room upstairs. Susan's bedroom was between the sitting room and the head of the uncarpeted marble stairs.

Presently she went into her own room and closed the door. If any one came upstairs she could be back with the others before the newcomer could reach the landing even.

It was on a Monday, and the wedding was to be on Thursday.

Susan sat down by the window and sniffed at a bottle of eau de cologne. Time was short, but she believed that success sat at her prow. Ginestra was nearly out of his mind over Sylvia and she as obviously (to her sister) captivated by his Byronesque qualities.

The difficulty was that while Sylvia thirsted for romance, the Italian was, in matters matrimonial, prosaic to the last degree, like most of his countrymen. If he had proposed carrying the girl away in his

yacht to marry at the first place they could land at, Susan believed that her sister would go.

But Ginestra, who was a gentleman, knew what was due to those future children of his, of whom he spoke with such embarrassing frankness to his virgin ally.

"It would not do for my sons to know that their mother was on my yacht for hours before we were married," he insisted obstinately.

On the other hand Sylvia would not hear of his going to her father and telling the truth, nor would she go herself. Also he had not been at all pleased to learn that Sylvia's wedding was only four days off. If he had been less deliriously in love he would, Susan knew, have retired from the field the moment he became aware of Gunning's position.

"It is dishonorable, ah, yes, but *very*," he declared, ruffling his glossy curls. "If I were not a coward, I should go away——"

"Then go," Susan told him more than once. "Sylvia likes you as much as she is capable of liking any one, but it won't break her heart, for the best of reasons; she also likes Gunning. She will soon forget you."

But the vision of Sylvia forgetting him in Gunning's arms was too much for Ginestra, and he stayed on. His always mournful face now stood him in good stead, for no one noticed his gloom, his face being, one may say, expressionless from too much expression.

And now Monday was nearly over.

Susan sniffed at her eau de cologne. Her hair, nearly as golden as Sylvia's, was of a different quality.



Whereas Sylvia's, these very warm days, hung in limp, silky little ringlets round her face and neck, Susan's curled fiercely up, and grew drier and almost metallic, like extremely fine wire. She did not get the blenched look of most foreigners in a hot southern summer. As she sat alone in her room, her intent face was an interesting study.

Time passed and no one came upstairs.

The air was full of the music of very distant children's voices and the laughter of fishermen on the village beach. The comparative coolness of evening had come, and the people had emerged from their darkened houses for a little air.

Presently Susan rose, and, listening intently for a moment at the door leading into the sitting room, went in. Sylvia was sitting near a window and Ginestra stood by her.

"Signorina," he began abruptly as Susan entered, "you must make her understand. I say I love her, and she loves me." There was none of poor Gunning's humility in the Corsair's manner. "I tell her then, *per conseguenza*, the only thing is for me to go and tell your Signor Padre, and then, if it is Signor Gunning's wishes to have a shot at me, I am ready."

Sylvia was crying now; that is to say, large drops of water were welling slowly from her eyes and rolling down her undistorted face.

"I don't want Hughie to shoot him," she said, turning to her sister helplessly. Since Ginestra's first word alone with her, Sylvia had returned to her old allegiance to Susan.

"Bosh, can you imagine Hughie doing anything so —so exciting? Don't be a goose, Sylvia."

"But poor Hughie will be miserable."

"For a day or two. He's not the kind to waste much time in repining. Besides," Susan went on gently, "if you marry him, think of poor Ginestra!"

Ginestra sketched despair with his hands.

"I will not live," he declared firmly, "if I lose you."

This kind of talk Sylvia thoroughly enjoyed. She raised her dripping eyes to his with more feeling in them than Susan had suspected her of possessing.

"Oh, Gianfranco," she wailed.

Susan nearly despaired. They were both obstinate, both idiotic, both maddeningly unpractical. Susan sighed and then sat down and drew on her almost hypnotic eloquence.

At the end of half an hour she rose, fairly satisfied, and was about to go downstairs when Gunning's voice was heard calling as he came up the stairs.

"Go into my room, Sylvia, and be perfectly quiet," whispered Susan. "I'll say you're asleep."

As the door closed, Gunning knocked at the other.

He was sorry Sylvia was asleep, but glad for her to be resting. Also he was glad to find the difficult Susan *tête-à-tête* with the Duke. Perhaps poor old Daffy would be granted her wish!

Susan rose presently. "I must leave you now," she said, shooting a warning glance at Ginestra, "I have an errand to do."

The two men followed her downstairs and she went on alone into the town.

Don Gregorio, who was sitting in his little garden, was all excitement as she unfolded her plan to him. Oh, yes, he would marry them. That was his duty, to marry, to baptize, to bury. The Signor Lamb-a would doubtless be angry, but—he shrugged his fat shoulders and spilt more snuff on his dirty soutane—“young people must follow their hearts.”

He was a kind old man and preached a very amusing sermon, which is more than most priests of any sect can boast of, and though he occasionally drank more black country wine than was good for him, no one minded, and his prestige was lowered thereby not one whit.

Susan told him at what hour the next morn the lovers would come to him, praised the beauty of his tortoise-shell cat and his few garden-flowers and then hurried home.

Her work was nearly at an end. By noon the next day, the Duke and Duchess di Ginestra would have left on their yacht, and she, Miss Lambe, could sit down and prepare to catch Gunning's heart on its rebound.

And then her face softened beautifully, so that a two-year-old baby, sitting in a ground floor window, held out its little arms to her and cooed in response. Then how happy she would make him! How she would care for him, anticipate his wishes, worship him.

And the presence of the yacht made things so simple. Sylvia would be gone before any one knew, so there would be no scenes, no reproaches. Susan was very glad, for in spite of her steel-spring nerves, she was tired. Her task had not been easy.

But now it was nearly over. Before she went down to dinner she looked from her balcony off seaward to the left, where the yacht lay. She felt positively grateful to the graceful craft.

But, like all managing people, Susan made one mistake. She forgot that others, beside herself, were possessed of active impulses. In her mind Sylvia and Ginestra were puppets in her hands; she did not consider the possibility of circumstances urging either of them to activity and yet this is what happened.

Some time after dinner, Gunning asked Sylvia to walk with him to the Poggio. The others sat on the terrace, chatting or watching the moonlit sea. It was cool now, and delightful after the heat of the day.

Susan, keeping an eye on Ginestra, who was the only moody one of the group, rested quietly in her chair, again thinking gratefully of the yacht.

Then back across the lawn came Sylvia and Gunning. They were not talking, but when they reached the shadow of the house, he, thinking they were invisible from where the others sat, bent and kissed her.

Ginestra rose, an oath half suppressed between his teeth. Then, as Susan too rose and tried to lead him away, he drew aside from her.

"I beg you, signorina," he said hoarsely.

Every one looked at him and when Sylvia and Gunning reached them, he spoke.

"Signor Gunning," he said in a voice that was suddenly quiet and clear, "may I have a word with you?"

"Certainly," assented Gunning, surprised.

But before the Italian could carry out his perfectly dignified plan, Sylvia gave a little scream and flew to Gunning.

"Hughie, Hughie," she cried, clasping his arm tightly, "you won't shoot him? Promise me you won't shoot him!"

Her face was perfectly white in the moonlight, and she was frantic with fear.

"Shoot him? Who?" the Englishman asked stupidly. "Don't be frightened, dear."

"Signor Lamb-a," interrupted the Italian, "it is this: I love your daughter and she loves me."

There was a pause, broken only by the sound of Sylvia's hysterical sobs. Then Ginestra went on with his exquisite courtesy to Gunning.

"I am quite at your service, signore."

Gunning did not answer for a moment, but stood with his hand on Sylvia's hair.

"Is—this—true?" he began, and then, correcting himself, "I beg your pardon, Duca, of course it is true. Sylvia, go and stand by him."

He pushed her gently toward the other man.

"Go, my dear, if—as—you love him. And you need not be afraid. I shall not shoot him."

Christopher Lambe had not moved. Now he rose.

"Hughie," he said, "I—I am ashamed of my daughter. Come into the house with me."

Gunning shook his head.

"Thanks, Mr. Lambe, I don't need a drink. Susan, when she stops crying, will you tell her, that—that it's all right! I'll go now."

He walked rapidly back toward the house and they heard his footsteps cease suddenly as he cut off over the lawn to the left toward the gate.

"He's forgotten his hat," said Daffy.

Sylvia burst into a peal of mad laughter at this. It was the last thing Gunning heard as he left the place.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**I**T was characteristic of Christopher Lambe that his daughter Sylvia was married the next morning to the Duca di Ginestra. The fact being established that Sylvia loved the Italian, there was, to his mind, nothing to do but allow her to marry the man, who was perfectly acceptable as a son-in-law, and, as it was to be, the sooner the better.

This was his simple line of reasoning, unfolded by him to his daughter at breakfast.

“You have behaved abominably,” he added to Sylvia, whose face bore not the faintest sign of the storm of the night before. “I am thoroughly ashamed of you, and I can only congratulate Gunning on his escape. But as you wish to marry Ginestra, I have nothing to say except that it must be at once.”

So good Padre Gregorio had the greatest shock of his life in perceiving to enter his sacristy at the hour stated, not only the romantic runaway couple, but the the bride’s father and sisters.

Ginestra had his papers in readiness, there was no hitch of any kind, and after the short ceremony Lambe shook hands with his daughter, the Duchess, and he and the other girls went back to the villa, while the young couple got into a cab and were driven to the top of the lane leading to the pier.

Susan stood at the dining-room window an hour later, while Thomas Screach laid the table.

"Oh, has my father told you, Thomas?" she said, without turning round, "Miss Sylvia was married this morning and has gone away."

Thomas, who had greatly increased in bulk in the last years, and who looked much like Randolph Caldecott's John Gilpin, nearly dropped a plate.

"Married, Miss!"

"Yes. So we shall only be three at luncheon."

"But, I beg pardon, Miss Susan, but Mr. Gunning only just come in a short while ago and is in the study this very minute."

Susan pointed to the beautiful white yacht that was moving slowly away toward Naples.

"On that boat, Thomas," she said, "are its master, the Duke of Ginestra and the Duchess. The Duchess, until an hour ago, was Miss Sylvia Lambe. Try not to have a fit."

Thomas had been in the house the day Sylvia was born; he had carried all three children in his arms; he considered himself almost a member, although a humble member, of the most important and eye-filling family in the world.

For a minute he was silent. Then, as he left the room, he turned.

"Thank you for telling me, Miss Susan."

When he had nearly closed the door he re-opened it a little and put his wide, red face into the crack.

"I'm afraid poor master must feel it," he murmured. Then he retired. He had the feelings of a gentleman,



had Thomas Screach, and to him was vouchsafed the knowledge, withheld from his young mistress, that Lambe would naturally be ashamed of his eldest girl's behavior.

Susan shrugged her shoulders. Screach and his opinions did not interest her.

What did interest her was the fact that Hugh Gunning was even then in the house.

She longed to see him, and yet she feared to. After hesitating for some minutes she went swiftly upstairs and locked herself in her bedroom.

She knew that he was suffering and she could not see his pain, not because it was pain, but because of the torments of jealousy it would cause herself.

In the study, meantime, Lambe and Gunning sat opposite each other by the window.

Gunning was not pale, but his face looked as if it had suddenly been hardened into a new mold. It was now a stern, cold face, devoid of youth and of hope. To Lambe it was dreadful.

"It's very fine of you to take it like this," Lambe said, lighting a cigarette as he broke a long silence.

Gunning laughed. "What else could I do? She loves him, and—that's all. I'm glad they were married at once."

"Yes—I knew you'd understand my hurrying it on. I—well, frankly, Hughie, I'm not so strong as you; I couldn't have stood seeing them about. It's a relief to have them out of the way. I—it is unpleasant to be ashamed of one's own flesh and blood."

"Don't be hard on her, sir. She's very young and

I am not an attractive fellow. He is. Besides, he seems quite *all right*."

"Oh, yes; he's right enough. We had a long talk last night. He didn't care a blow about the settlement, which, of course, is exceptional."

Gunning winced. His settlements, giving his future wife half his income for her own for his life, and everything he had in the world in the event of his death, were already drawn up. He recalled signing them in the dusty, musty room in Bedford Row, and the memory of his exultant happiness that day cut him like a knife.

"From the little I saw of him I should say he was a very decent chap. He also—cares very much for her. If he hadn't he—he couldn't have done what he did. I suppose she was afraid to let him tell——"

"Oh, obviously," agreed her father dryly, "if he hadn't lost his head we should have been favored with a moonlight flitting. She is a coward—Sylvia."

Gunning rose. "Well—I must get back up the hill. I shall stay another week with my mother; she is very much upset. Then I shall go back to England. I'll see you again before I go——"

They shook hands and Christopher Lambe longed for words in which to express his regret for what his daughter had done and his admiration for the bravery with which the younger man was accepting the blow. But no words came and they parted in silence.

In the hall, as Gunning went out, Screach and the young footman were superintending the unloading of

a cart from the station; large wooden cases stood on the steps and another was still in the cart.

"Oh, Mr. Gunning"—poor Screach tried to be his usual self and to look ignorant of the fact that the cases contained gifts for a wedding that would never take place. But he had known Gunning for many years and the young man had always been kind to him.

"Oh, Mr. Gunning——"

Hugh tried to smile. "Never mind, Thomas—I understand. Just let me by, will you?"

"If ever," declared Screach to himself, but aloud as he disappeared down the drive, "I see a broken heart, there goes one now." Then he swore very violently at the clumsy carrier.

That afternoon Susan Lambe drove up the long hill in a fly and got out at Donna Mabel's villa.

It was raining and Donna Mabel was in the drawing room, moving restlessly about, gazing often at the pictures of her late husband, opening and closing the windows, beginning letters and tearing them up, and often pausing to listen for the sounds that occasionally came from the room above.

She had cried, poor lady, and her complexion was streaked and blotched.

When Susan, trim and shipshape in a new linen frock, came in, Donna Mabel burst into tears again.

"Oh, Susan Lambe, aren't you ashamed to show your face to me?" she cried, even while she reached up to kiss her caller.

Susan straightened a scrap of lace on her hostess's disheveled head.

"No, dear Donna Mabel, I'm not. *I* haven't jilted Hughie. You know how much I love him, so you must realize how sorry I am for him. But you *don't* know Sylvia, so you can't realize how utterly helpless I was!"

"Helpless? Then you knew?"

Susan sat down. "Of course I did—ten days ago. He told me! I had to promise not to tell, so I couldn't. Besides—well, I'm sure that after the first shock poor old Hughie will find he's well out of it!"

"His heart is broken," protested his mother. "He will *never* get over it."

They sat there in the pretty, shady room listening to the beating of the long-wished-for rain, and little by little Susan succeeded in convincing Donna Mabel that Hugh had had a lucky escape.

"I never realized that she was quite so—so empty-headed," she faltered, for, after all, had not her wonderful son adored the empty-headed one?

Susan shrugged her shoulders.

"Sylvia has never had one single idea since the day she was born," she declared gently. "You know that I love her, but I have lived too intimately with her not to know *that*. Hugh would have found it out and she'd have bored him to death. I am sure of this."

Donna Mabel blew her nose. "I can't understand it. *You* are clever, why should she be so—so queer?"

Susan kissed her. "*I'm* not clever, dear Donna Mabel," she protested prettily, "it's only that you happen to be fond of me that makes you think I am."

But Sylvia, poor beautiful darling—and no one knows better than I how sweet and dear she is—she is really almost abnormal. Her brain simply doesn't work. And Hughie never saw it. I never saw Sylvia in the least interested in anything until this man came along. She *is* in love with *him*. And I hope he will wake her up."

"She is a wicked, wicked girl and doesn't deserve to be happy——"

"Ah, please, Donna Mabel! Don't be cruel to me. I have told you all this, that I never before told a living soul, because I thought it might console you for Hughie's loss, but—you must remember she is my sister, and I love her."

As she finished speaking the door opened and Gunning came in.

"Did I leave my fountain pen——" he began and broke off. "Oh, is that you, Susan?" He held out his hand, and hers, as she took it, was so cold that he looked at her pityingly.

"You look tired," he said. "Give her some tea, mother."

Suddenly a strange thing happened to Susan. Her long strung-up nerves gave way with a crash, as it were, and she burst into a fit of dry sobbing. If her life had depended on it she could not have stopped, but if she had feigned the breakdown it could not have been better timed.

Gunning laid his arm over her shoulders and drew her to him. "Poor old girl," he said soothingly. "Don't do that! Come, come, Sukey."

Still sobbing hysterically, but with dry eyes, she looked up into his stony face. For a moment she studied it and then for the first time real pity for him touched her, and the tears came.

He, of course, took her emotion to mean sympathy and regret mingled, and he was moved and surprised by it. He held her gently in his arms as a brother might have done, and even in her nervous state it was an exquisite thing to her to have her head on his breast.

When at last she drew away he lent her his handkerchief and she wiped her eyes, half laughing.

"Oh, Hughie, to think that I should be such an idiot!"

"Never mind, Susan; after all, you aren't very old, and—last night was pretty bad for us all, wasn't it?"

Donna Mabel had gone out on the terrace to see if the sudden cessation of rain meant a fine evening or was merely a trick of the weather.

"Hughie—do you really care so—so *dreadfully* much?" Susan looked away as she spoke.

There was a long pause and then he gave a half laugh.

"*Do I care*, Susan? Why, she was to have been my wife by this time the day after to-morrow. And—I never cared for any other woman in my life. So there's an end to that. Let's not discuss it. I am not angry, and I hope I'm not bitter, but I can't talk about it."

He followed his mother to the terrace and shortly afterward went upstairs again.

Susan did not see him again for many months, but she was wise and bided her time without impatience. He did not come again to the villa and none of the family saw him again except Daffy, who alone of the three would have let him go without an effort to have a word with him.

On the Thursday that was to have been the wedding day Daffy was alone in the Poggio after dinner. The moon was waning, but the night was clear and from the Alma Tadema bench the sound of the cascade made music in the still air.

The girl sat quite quietly on the marble seat, her head leaning back against its low curved back, so that she looked through the trees into the sky.

She was thinking about Hugh, as she had been thinking without ceasing for the past three days, and when she heard footsteps at some distance off on the gravel path she seemed to know that it was he.

The footsteps stopped and she sat up straight and looked for him.

He stood near one of the Poggio's most beautiful treasures, the one the site for which Lambe had decided, she knew, the very day the Bishop had brought her, so long ago.

It was a kind of memorial stone, beautifully and richly carved on four sides, and Daffy knew the inscription by heart.

She wondered why Gunning was kneeling by it now. But she did not move, her little figure in its filmy gray gown being quite unnoticeable to him as he knelt.

Presently he rose and came slowly toward her.

"Ah, Daffy——"

She rose and they shook hands rather formally.

"I didn't expect to find you here," he went on, sitting down as if he were very tired. "I didn't go to the house——"

"I'll not mention it," she returned promptly.

"I—I came to do a rather childish thing," he went on after a pause. "The bridal bouquet arrived from England this morning—it was a fancy I had—and—well, come, little Daffy, and I'll show you." His hand as he took hers was very hot.

They walked in silence back to the beautiful broken pedestal and she saw at the foot of it a mound of freshly moved soil.

"It's—it's the bouquet," Gunning explained laboriously, "it was ordered for the wedding, you see, and it has served at—a burial instead——"

Poor cowardly Daffy, she was frightened to death, his voice was so strange.

"Hughie, come to the house and rest awhile. Father will be so glad to see you—he is so fond of you."

"Ah, yes, you are all fond of me, aren't you? Particularly Sylvia."

He knelt down and she knelt with him.

"Can you read this?" he asked suddenly, in a perfectly natural voice.

"Yes—I can read it," she faltered.

"Read it to me, will you? My head aches so——"

In the ancient stone most of the inscription was still legible in its lovely garland of flowers.



“*Mutae Tutelae*,

“*Sanctissimae*,

“*Sacrime*,

“*Hortensiae*—” spelled out Daffy, whose Latin education was by no means comprehensive.

“*Conjugia carrissimae*,

“*Dominae dulcissimae*,

“*Indulgentissimae*—” but at this point Gunning interrupted her.

“Let me do it, dear,” he said gently, “I’ll put it into English for you; it’s so pretty. I’m—I’m going to have it put on Sylvia’s grave—if she should die first. Listen. This Roman gentleman had it put on this stone in the year 276. His wife had died, you understand, and this is her memorial stone:

“To the silent, tutelar Diety,

“A place dedicated to the most sainted Hortensia Ennoea, a most dear spouse,” he faltered for a moment and then went on haltingly, “a most charming, kind and devout lady, generously furnished with an excellent mind, most courteous, sincere, genial and distinguished; well deserving of every good, a most worthy lady with whom I, Titus Claudius Horus, have lived a good life for very many years—for very many years,” he repeated vaguely. “Do you like it, Daffy?”

“It is—beautiful, Hughie,” she answered with stiff lips.

“Shall I go on?”

“Yes, please.”

Drawing a deep breath, he continued:

“She was rendered free from care on the 11th of October and was buried during the consulate of Cornellius and Vettonianus. By command of her husband this altar was dedicated on’—it’s indistinct here—‘about the 7th May.’ ”

He stopped. “I think I told you that I buried the bridal bouquet here? Well—that’s all. I’m going away to-morrow. I thought I’d stay longer, but my mother is calmer—and—I wish to get away.”

They rose and he brushed the dry earth carefully from the knees of his trousers.

“Good-bye, Daffy-down-Dilly.”

“Good-bye, Hughie—your hands are so hot——”

“Oh, I’m all right. I shan’t be ill, you needn’t be afraid. I think I’ve a little fever, but that doesn’t matter. This was to have been my wedding day, you know,” he added, looking a little wildly at her, “and—it isn’t. That’s all. Good-bye.”

She watched his tall figure until it was lost among the trees and then went slowly back to the house.

It was two years before she saw him again.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**S**USAN LAMBE was a born tactician and uncannily wise for so young a woman. It may be said that in her campaign for winning the heart of the man she loved, she made, as far as he was concerned, only one mistake.

Hugh Gunning, in spite of his feverish condition the night that was to have been that of his wedding, did not have what is known as brain fever. But he had managed to get a very bad cold and for the next few days was in bed with something unpleasantly like pneumonia. When he was better Susan went to see him, and having laid out a line of conduct for herself, she never wavered from it.

She seemed to the weak and unhappy man the very ideal of a young sister. He reproached himself for having hitherto misjudged her, and repaid her gentle ministrations with the dawnings of a real affection. Donna Mabel, to whom Susan had always paid court, nodded triumphantly when her son commented on Susan's kindness. "What have I always told you? She is by far the nicest of the three. She is coming this afternoon with a new book for you and to-morrow or the next day she is sending the victoria for us to have a drive. That will cheer you up."

Poor Gunning, these cheerless words were often on

his mother's lips, but he was made of patient stuff and always accepted them as they were meant. They used to sit in the loggia leading from his room, and then in the afternoon shade, a bowl of ice on the table nearby and flowers in vases, he lay stretched out in a long chair and listened to Susan's musical voice as she read aloud.

He was very weak for a few days, which was a merciful thing, and at times he almost forgot his sorrow and lay in a kind of mist of restfulness, feeling vaguely that at any minute the mist might roll away and leave him face to face with horrors, but that for the moment he was very comfortable.

And Donna Mabel, passing restlessly in and out of the loggia, believed that the luminous idea that had come to her about her beloved son and her favorite Susan was as unsuspected by the girl as it was by the man.

Thus Susan made friends with Gunning and before he went away, looking very thin and taller than ever, she had, she knew, won his confidence as well as his friendship.

"You will look after my mother, dear Susan," he said as they parted. "I shan't come back here for a long time—I shall be very busy."

"Trust me, Hughie," she replied. "I shall be all alone, you see, for father and Daffy are going to Canada, and I will do all I can to cheer Donna Mabel up."

He smiled at the phrase she had adopted from his mother and shook her hand warmly.

"Good-bye, my dear, and thanks for all your goodness to me. I shall never forget it."

She watched the carriage drive away—he had stopped at the villa on purpose to see her—and then with a sigh she went into the house.

Lambe and Daffy were in Naples that day making a few hasty purchases for their suddenly decided journey. Daffy was in a state of almost delirious though perfectly silent joy over the prospect of the summer and autumn in Canada, alone with her beloved father. The two were closer to each other than ever since Sylvia's marriage, for each felt, although they had not discussed it, that they shared the same disgust for the beautiful Duchess's behavior. They were both ashamed of her and the feeling somehow drew them closer together. Subconsciously Lambe loved Daffy less as a daughter than if she had been some sympathetic youth bound to him by no troublesome duty ties, but to whom a chance similarity of nature attracted him.

And when the great idea of her going with him on his aimless roving expedition occurred to him, he suggested it to her as he would have done to the hypothetical youth.

"Canada must be a fine country. A change of air wouldn't hurt you, Daffy. Why don't you come with me?"

And Daffy had agreed as simply.

Four days after Gunning's departure the Canadian bound travelers left Sorrento and the breathless hush of midsummer fell on the villa.

Lambe had called once on Gunning, but they had not mentioned Sylvia, and Daffy had not gone to Donna Mabel's house at all.

"Why should poor old Hughie want to see me?" she returned when the gentle Susan suggested that Donna Mabel might wonder why Daffy did not call. "Besides, I'm ashamed."

Shortly after, when left alone, Susan invited Donna Mabel to come down and stop with her.

"We are both lonely," she said, "and it is cooler here than up there. You can have the yellow rooms and I'll try to make you comfortable."

Donna Mabel jumped at the chance. She was quite contented with her shabby old rooms, but while she could live simply and be satisfied, yet she loved luxury as she loved strong scents. These natures are not uncommon, though they are illogical.

So down she came with the two photographs of her poor Livio, her canaries, her embroidery frame with its apparently hopeless entanglement of silks, her numerous shapeless tea-gowns, her favorite books, and her mandolin.

Susan was indeed very good to her, but Donna Mabel, quite without bitterness, wondered how it was that she was so often alone.

The long summer drew out its golden length, the neighboring hotels were filled for a time with chattering Neapolitans come for the bathing, the beaches were crowded every morning with a shrill-voiced, voluble crowd in costumes, many-colored and vivid.

Most of the villa people went away, so that Susan

in her early morning or evening walks rarely met a familiar face except those of the peasants.

Several yachts anchored under the cliffs; Neapolitan singers, in boats trimmed with paper lanterns, stationed themselves under all lighted windows and their crews made the night hideous with "Santa Lucia" and "Addio, mia Bella Napoli."

Melons were sold in the streets, donkeys wore straw hats with holes for their ears, people slept in the middle of the day and ladies repaired the ravages of the heat with increased toll from their rouge pots.

Leigh Hunt summed up a hot summer very beautifully in two lines that Susan frequently recalled during those blindingly bright days:

"When ladies loiter in baths  
And people make presents of flowers."

But behind their high walls the two ladies lived in very great comfort.

Twice letters came from Canada, one rather descriptive from Daffy, who evidently, in the joy of words, forgot to whom she was writing.

"She is mad about pine trees and sunsets," commented Susan rather scornfully, "and it all sounds very rough. I should hate living in a tent."

The other letter was a short note from Lambe directing his daughter where to send his letters and adding that they were both very well and enjoying themselves hugely.

Gunning, on the other hand, wrote often. His letters were addressed to his mother, but they were meant

for Susan as well, to whom he invariably added, "my love."

Parliament was sitting late that year and Gunning was evidently deeply interested in his new duties as a member. He was working very hard "learning the ropes," as he put it, and apparently he found little time for social doings.

"He will do big things, dear," Susan once said to his mother, who now lived, one may say, in the shadow of her wing. "How proud we shall be."

Donna Mabel picked at her mandolin and the horrid instrument gave out little disjointed twinges of melody under her fingers.

"Madame Sylvia will be sorry some day," she answered.

"Poor Sylvia! She is very happy. It was a clear case of natural selection. They exactly suit each other, so why be grudging?"

Donna Mabel admired Susan's charitableness as well as her kindness. She herself was one of the women whose natures never grow old. There were times when she quite forgot that she was thirty-two years older than the girl, but Susan's sway, though absolute, was benevolent. Only once that summer and autumn did Susan write to Gunning. Her letter, being characteristic, may be quoted:

"September 20th.

"DEAR HUGHIE:

"Your mother is lying down with a headache, so I am writing for her to thank you for the books and



the silks. Will you please go to Heads and buy three more skeins like this sample I enclose? There is no news except that father and Daffy are going to Japan. They are both well and seem to be having a very good time.

"Your mother and I are living the life of nuns, but we enjoy it. It is so nice for me to have her, and I think she is quite happy—as happy as she can be while you are away. Are you not coming for Christmas? I wish you could, for I am to be away. Sylvia is not very well and I am going to her. I haven't told your mother yet, but I feel that I ought to go. Do say you can come to her if only for a few days, and then she will not so mind my going.

"We read every word of your two speeches—but she will have written you that. Glad you are resting. Sorry to see by the papers that Scotland is having so much rain.

"Well, I'm being very dull, so I'll say good-bye.

"Always yours affectionately,

"SUSAN LAMBE."

Naturally enough, Gunning was impressed by the spirit of unselfishness breathing in this communication and his answer to it was full of gratitude and affection.

A few days before Christmas Susan accompanied Donna Mabel back up the hill and settled her comfortably in her own house and the day before Gunning came the girl left for Rome.

## CHAPTER XXIX

“**T**HERE’S the motor—surely! Look out, Susan, and see!”

Lady Corisande sat by the fireplace, which was filled with maiden-hair ferns, and absently held her hands to them as if they had been flames and she cold.

Susan went out into the tiny balcony and leaning over it looked down into the square.

It was eight o’clock in the evening and people were arriving at the neighboring houses for dinner, so that the usually quiet place was full of vehicles, chiefly private motor-cars.

“No, Aunt Corisande, it’s some very gorgeous dame arriving at the Wellbrooks.”

“Oh, dear, where can they be? I said half-past eight, meaning nine, on purpose to give them a little leeway. The train was due at seven.”

Susan, who looked extremely handsome in her tight black gown, came back from the window with a laugh.

“That doesn’t matter when it’s father. I mean, there are a million queer mishaps that could happen to no one else, but which could easily happen to him. And as to Daffy, she is the unluckiest person in the world. Probably,” she added, sitting down, “they have forgotten the address!”

Lady Corisande uttered a little cry of horror. "Oh, no! Surely, not even they could do that."

"They may have forgotten their luggage—left it on the wharf or something. Ah, there's our bell."

The Bishop and his wife had been bidden to welcome the travelers home and they arrived promptly. A little later Fred Peplow came sauntering in, much amused by the characteristic non-appearance of Christopher Lambe and his youngest girl.

"They're to stop here, are they not?" he asked his wife.

"No. He cabled they were going to the Ritz. What an idiot I am," she added, "we can telephone there and see if they have come. Antoine will leave if his dinner is spoilt, and then I should die. Susan, will you telephone?"

Susan left the room.

The Bishop, whose handsome head was now of a reverend silvery hue, stood by the window. The world had gone well with him, and his wife was as satisfactory as most wives who came under his notice, although he had a suspicion that she sometimes chuckled a little to herself over some of his professional platitudes. A handsome man, the Bishop, and probably deserving of his reputation for being the best dressed cleric in England.

"I am glad little Daffy is coming back," he said while they waited for Susan's report from the Ritz. "A nice child, Daffy. She will be glad to have her share of the delights of London, too, after all this wandering. A strange idea of Kit's, taking a bit of

a girl to rough it in Canada. Well, Susan," he broke off blandly—only exceptionally lucky clergymen ever escape the taint of blandness—"what news?"

"They have arrived, but it seems father got mixed and cabled the Ritz in Paris for rooms, so there was some difficulty in finding an apartment for them. Aunt Corisande, father says, his love to you, and please not to wait dinner. They will come as soon as they can get their clothes unpacked."

Accordingly, the fish in its beautiful green-bedded entirety was a thing of the past when Mr. and Miss Lambe were ushered into the dining-room. They looked, these two small, bright-eyed, sunbrowned people, almost like foreigners amid the group of large, fair, typical Britons. Daffy was kissed by every one and Lambe's hand grasped warmly. There was what might have been termed an orderly hubbub for a few minutes, and then every one sat down and dinner went on.

Daffy looked curiously at Susan, whose looks had much improved.

"You're nearly as good-looking as Sylvia, Susan," she said abruptly. "I like your hair like that."

It was characteristic of her that, though she did not like her sister, it never occurred to her to withhold from her the praise that she honestly deserved.

Susan laughed. "Very glad, I'm sure. You look well, Daffy."

"Daffy's always well," put in her father, beaming at her across the table, "she's the best traveler in the

world, too. You've plenty of interesting things to tell Susan, haven't you?"

"Oh, they wouldn't interest girls," objected Daffy, as if she herself were a boy. Every one laughed.

"Are you glad you are going to balls, Daffy?" It was Aunt Corisande who spoke.

"Yes, Aunt Corisande, thank you. I want to go to the House and hear Hughie Gunning make a speech."

Susan laughed. "Precious little you'd understand of it, I can tell you. It was Greek to me at first, and even now I don't always know what they're at."

"So you've become a political woman, Susan?" asked her father.

Fred Peplow set down his glass and wiped his little upturned mustache.

"Susan is the wonder of the world," he explained, "she knows more about politics than any woman ever born. She's going to be the first She Prime Minister!"

Daffy watched her sister curiously and the old feeling came over her. "Susan is up to something." Daffy was not at all observant in the usual sense of the word, but the instinct against danger was as strong as it is in some helpless little animals. This faculty had had occasion to win her own respect during her two years' trials, and although Lambe called it by the unromantic name of Daffy's rat-smelling, he too believed in it.

And as Daffy watched her sister in one of the ruminative and unexplained silences that had become a very marked characteristic of hers, her father chanced to notice her face. A minute later their glances met,

and as Lambe's eyebrows climbed expressively upward toward his receding hair, she gave a short nod. There was, one could see, very great confidence between them.

Lady Corisande was meantime very busy giving her brother-in-law a résumé of the delights in store for his youngest daughter during the month she was to be in town.

"It's a very gay season," she explained, with her kind, broad smile, "so many people have *débutante* girls—there is nearly a glut of balls. Of course you dance, Daffy?"

But Daffy explained, unashamed, that she did not, owing to a habit of invariably falling down. "My feet seem to catch," she went on, with an amiable desire to make this point clear to her aunt.

"Oh, dear, that is *very* bad. You might have some lessons—or, well, I don't know, a girl who doesn't dance would be rather striking."

The Bishop inquired whether Daffy played or sang. Again she shook her bushy black head. "Yes, I play rather well—technically, I mean, but it doesn't go beyond my fingers. I am quite unmusical, and I can shoot," she declared, without the least intention of being funny.

"Of course, every hostess will at once have a shooting gallery installed in her back drawing room," laughed Fred Peplow.

Susan made no disagreeable remarks. Indeed, she declared that it was a relief to find a girl who "did" nothing. "And Daffy looks utterly unlike other girls,

Aunt Corisande," she added in a pleasant voice, "that is something."

Later in the evening, while the two girls chatted together in Susan's room, whither she had taken her sister to have a stitch put into a stepped-upon hem, Susan said, "I am glad you have come back, Daff."

"Are you? Why?" Her dark eyes stared hard at Susan. They were very attractive eyes, with a funny little pucker, later to become a wrinkle, between the brows.

Susan laughed. "You funny child! Well, because I am, I suppose. After all, we are sisters."

"Poof!" returned Daffy, as the maid bit off the cotton and rose from her knees, "*that* never made any difference."

She spoke without resentment, but her voice was rather final.

When they were alone Susan came to her and put one hand on her shoulder.

"I know what you mean—of course I do. I wasn't nice to you and it was horrid of me, but—you'll find me nicer now, I think."

Daffy stirred uncomfortably under her hand.

"Oh, it's all right, Susan—it didn't matter. Oh, I say," she broke off, with a little dash to the dressing-table, "here's Hughie! What a ripping picture! But—how old he looks."

Susan smiled. "Yes, of course, he looks old to *you*. He is nearly thirty-four, you see."

"Did he give you this? I want one, too."

"Of course he gave it to me. We are *great* friends,"

answered Susan quietly. "He is coming in to-night for a few minutes, so you will see him."

Daffy beamed as her father sometimes beamed. Then she suddenly grew grave. "Susan—he is *all right?*" she asked, almost in a whisper. "I mean to say—he has *got over it?*"

Susan took up a comb and loosened her hair at one side.

"Jeanne is the *worst* hair-dresser. Oh, got over Sylvia, you mean? Of course he has, my dear. Men don't break their hearts nowadays."

"Well, I didn't know. He was—*awful* bad at first."

"You didn't see him after—the scene—so how can you tell how bad he was? Come along, let's go downstairs."

Daffy followed her in silence. It was not for her to tell of the burying of the bridal bouquet.

Gunning had come in while they were upstairs and stood by the window talking to Lambe. Susan watched their meeting. Daffy, who ten years before would have marched sedately up to greet him, had learned a more grown-up liveliness of demeanor, and dashed at him joyfully.

"Oh, Hughie, how are you?"

He took her hands and smiled down at her. "My dear Daffy, I *am* glad to see you!"

Then her smile died away, leaving her face stamped with the expression of weary age that had been its strange attribute when she was a wee child. She was thinking, he knew, of their last meeting, and his face, too, grew grave.



There was a short pause, and then she asked him how his mother was.

A moment later he drifted away from her and sat down near Susan with the air of one doing what through custom has become nearly an instinct. Lambe put his arm round Daffy and drew her out on the balcony.

"Do you like it?" he whispered.

"Not much—do you?"

For answer he made an awful face. "We'll go soon—tired after our journey."

Refreshed by this brief talk they went back into the drawing room and presently Lambe asked Susan to play.

Stripping her delicate fingers of her rings, she sat down at the piano and turned off all the lights but a distant shaded one.

"What shall I play, Hughie?" she asked.

Gunning folded his arms and leaned comfortably back in his chair.

"Schumann," he answered.

Susan Lambe could never be accused of burying her talents. She had developed her musical gift in an astonishing way and now possessed a technique equal to that of many professionals. Yet her technique was never over-conspicuous and she had attained a masterly simplicity of style. That evening she played, she felt, even almost better than ever.

She was, for one reason, extremely happy. The end of her plotting and struggling seemed now close at hand, and when once her end was gained there was

to be an end to all the schemes and deceits that had been necessary to gaining it.

Forgetting that the habit of deceit is of all habits the most nearly impossible to shake off, she saw herself as she played as the simple, frank, happy woman Hugh Gunning deserved for a wife. Never for a moment had she underrated his uncompromising honesty, and she felt to the depths of her soul that she, as she now was, was unworthy of him.

Her mistake was in believing that she could change after the plotting of the last two years and become what he believed her to be.

"Poor little Daffy," she dreamed in the fragrant dusk, while the piano sang under her touch, "I will be very kind to her, and she must marry some nice man and never have to go through what *I* have had to. He likes her, too, and I can have her come to stop with us. She is almost pretty now, her little head is beautifully shaped, and her nose is better than either Sylvia's or mine."

And Daffy, ashamed of herself for the thought and really touched by Susan's change of manner and her tardy apology, sat with her eyes closed as the music swept unappreciated past her unworthy ears, and again wondered what Susan was up to.

## CHAPTER XXX

**B**Y the time that the month was over and the day for their leaving London approached, Daffy had come to the conclusion that whatever Susan might be up to there was not the slightest use in her, Daffy's, trying to discover what it was.

Susan was consistently kind to her, took her to see pictures and flowers, arranged to have her meet certain minor celebrities admired from afar by her sister—in a word, Susan was perfection in her manner. And Daffy was grateful, but at the same time she wondered.

At balls Daffy was a dire failure. Not dancing and not beautiful, she was not even tall enough to be seen in a crowd, and as she was miserably uncomfortable in a crowd, Aunt Corisande after three trials agreed with her that she might as well give up that particular form of amusement.

So Daffy confined herself in the future to dinner parties, which she loved and at which, quite unexpectedly to her aunt, she achieved a modest success almost at once.

"Miss Lambe is charming," a very important old Duchess growled affably to Lady Corisande, "extremely handsome, and, my son-in-law tells me, is un-

usually well informed for a young woman, but the little one is very amusing. Very like her father, too, isn't she, and the other is all Pember."

Daffy's amusingness consisted chiefly in the blunt opinions she offered on any subject that chanced to come up and in the absurd blunders she made, always without hurting any one in any way; she herself did not suspect her own possession of it and was humble about her social gifts.

"Awfully good of Mrs. So-and-So to ask me," she often said, "if I were in her place I wouldn't invite Daphne Lambe to my parties."

Her father was amused by her modest popularity and Susan was sincerely delighted.

Daffy had brought Paris clothes, which had cost a fortune, from New York, so her time was her own, with no toll to pay to dressmakers.

The month was delightful, but the night before she was to leave town, Daffy confided to Hugh Gunning that she was glad it was over.

"I shall be delighted to get back to the dear villa," she added.

They had dined *tête-à-tête* at Lady Corisande's, for even Susan had been obliged to keep an old engagement, and were now sitting in the drawing room listening to the rain pattering down on the balcony outside the wide-open windows.

Gunning nodded. "I know. One gets awfully sick of—all this. Without my work I shouldn't have been able to stand it for a week. But, Daffy—how about young Macclesfield?"

Daffy looked at him calmly. "Mr. Macclesfield? Yes, what about him?"

The oval of her face was really very pretty and the youthful smoothness of her pale cheeks had a certain charm of its own. Gunning looked at her with a new interest. It was strange to him that she, far more than the beautiful Susan, reminded him at times of Sylvia. Something in the way she moved her little upper lip, he thought it was—or was it an occasional movement of her head?

"I thought," he said, suddenly a little embarrassed, as she repeated her question about Mr. Macclesfield, "I thought you liked him?"

"I do. What has that to do with my going to Italy?"

She knew perfectly well what he meant, he saw, but she refused to be led on.

"I thought you were perhaps going to marry him," he said simply, and her face cleared.

"I'm not," she answered, as simply.

"Daffy—do you remember what a little fibber you used to be?"

"I was a nasty little liar till—till that night—" she broke off short as the memory of the night in question, the night of the day when Gunning had asked Sylvia to marry him, rushed over her.

There was a short pause, and then she went on, "I *am* so glad you said—what you did. You see, I was lonely in a way; Sylvia and Susan were always together and that threw me on my own resources. Besides, I think it is very easy for a coward to be a liar

as well." Her hands folded together on her lap, she sat quite still, gazing out into the wet night.

"But—you aren't a coward now, Daffy, surely?"

"Oh, *ain't* I? I just am, though, Hughie. I don't suppose I'll ever be brave—I mean fearless. There's a difference in the meaning of the two words, don't you think?"

"Yes— I dare say there is," he answered, but he hesitated, for the differentiation had in truth never occurred to him before.

"But, Hughie—you aren't afraid of, say—cows. Well, I am. Now, if you walked through a drove of cows you would be fearless, but not *brave*, and it always comforts me to think that if *I* walk through a drove of cows, frightened to death as I always am, I *am* brave, because in spite of being afraid, I go. Don't you see?"

Her little face was very eager as she explained and he was touched.

"Of course I see, dear. And you are quite right. I was frightened to death, for instance, when I first spoke in the House, so I know what it is. But—it simplifies life to be fearless. I should say Susan was, quite; shouldn't you?"

"Yes. But Susan would be brave even if she was afraid. She was always brave. Sylvia was—" She broke off.

Gunning took out his cigarette case. "I may smoke?" After a pause he went on, looking at the floor, "You needn't avoid speaking to me about Sylvia, Daffy."

"Needn't I, Hughie? I thought——"

"I know. You thought it would hurt me. Well, it doesn't, my dear."

"All right," she answered simply, "I'm glad."

"You see," he went on, "I never forget her. She—she is something to me that no one else can ever be. I think of her every day of my life, and I still have her picture in my watch."

As he spoke he opened the back of his watch and handed it to her. In silence she looked at the little head of her sister.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he asked. "I wonder if you know I saw her a year ago? No, ten months, it was."

Daffy stared. "Did you? No, I never heard. *Where?*"

"At her home near Rome. My mother was there for Christmas with our Ambassador, who is her cousin, and I went down to see her. I wrote and asked Sylvia if I might come and call and Ginestra answered the letter, asking me to come and stop. So I went. I was there three days."

"Was it—nice?" asked Daffy breathlessly.

"Delightful. A beautiful old place, and he is a very nice fellow. They are as happy as possible and the little boy was even then quite beautiful."

"Is Sylvia as lovely as ever?"

"Lovelier," he answered steadily, "and not one bit changed. She still drops off to sleep on the slightest occasion, and he watches her just as he did years ago, that day on the boat—till she wakes up."

Daffy nodded. "I am glad. I am to go and visit

her some time. I shall love the baby. Does Susan spend much time there?"

"No. She is usually with my mother—they are very fond of each other. But she comes very often to stop here. Lady Corisande is fond of her, too."

"Hughie."

"Well?"

"I want your photograph—one like Susan's. Will you give it to me?"

He laughed. "Of course I will, you funny child. But why should you want a picture of my plain face?"

Daffy reflected. "I don't know," she returned honestly. "Why should Susan?"

This remark made him pause. "Susan? Well, yes. I don't know—only Susan and I are very great friends. I see a lot of her while she's in town, and then at the villa, of course."

But he sent the photograph the next day and Daffy locked it in her letter-case.

Gunning, for his part, thought a great deal about her in the next few months. She pleased him very much, in a perfectly unemotional way, and her fugitive resemblance to Sylvia had a great charm for him.

Perhaps it was because she had so long been absent and that during her absence she had done the undefinable thing, "grown-up," but he felt remotely that she was less of a sister to him than Susan was. He could not read her thoughts as he imagined he could read the older girl's, and often he caught himself wondering what she had been pondering on some past



occasions while she sat straight and prim and silent among talking people.

It added a distinct pleasure to his anticipation of his next visit to Sorrento to think that Daffy would be there.

Meantime Susan worked quietly on, her eyes on one fixed point ahead. And when the time came for her to go to Sylvia's before settling at Sorrento for the winter, and Gunning had said nothing to her, still her patience was not exhausted.

He would miss her during her absence and in the pleasure of seeing her again at the villa—it would surely come.

## CHAPTER XXXI

**Y**OUNG Mr. Macclesfield proved the means of bringing about Hugh Gunning's deciding to marry. It happened in September, when Gunning was just on the point of starting back to England, and it happened, like most momentous things, quite simply.

One morning just before luncheon a note was brought for Lambe from the Tramontana, and when he had read it he sat down and wrote an answer. Then he turned to Gunning, who was sitting near him reading his letters, which had just come.

"Daffy's admirer has turned up, it appears. He is at the hotel and wishes to know when he may call. I've told him to come to lunch."

Gunning looked up. "Ah, young Macclesfield? A nice boy."

"Very nice. I think Corisande had views regarding him."

"I think he had views regarding himself."

"I dare say. Daffy won't marry him, however."

The two men were silent for a moment, and then Lambe went on in an innocent tone, "*She* isn't the marrying kind, but I've often wondered why Susan hasn't found some one to her liking."

"She is unusually clever, for one thing. I dare say lots of men would be afraid of her."

"Yes, the empty-headed type would, of course, but there *are* clever men, and she would be a good wife to some one who needed a brilliant, managing one."

"She would, indeed," Gunning agreed unconsciously. "There was Drayton-Gore, for instance, he was very much taken with her, but she wouldn't look at him—really almost uncivil once or twice."

Lambe was silent for several minutes and then he said calmly, "Why don't *you* marry her, Hughie?"

"Me? I?" Gunning's amazement was laughable. "Good heavens! Susan wouldn't look at me."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Why—of course—what an idea!" But the younger man rose and walked restlessly toward the window, an uneasy look on his face.

Lambe watched him. "I am very fond of you, Gunning," he resumed, without getting up, "and I should like to have you for a son-in-law. It seems to me that Susan likes you better than any one, although I, of course, know nothing about her feelings. You and she are certainly good friends, and—well, there you are. You would never have thought of it, so I have outraged the social code by proposing to you for my daughter!"

Gunning turned. "I needn't tell you how fond I am of your daughter," he began, but at that moment Susan herself came into the room.

"Young Macclesfield has come," she said, "and Daffy turned perfectly scarlet when she saw him! They are in the garden now."

"I know—he wrote from Tramontana's to ask if he might call. Daffy shan't marry him, though!"

Susan smiled, and there was real sweetness in her smile. Her own happiness she believed to be within a stone's throw, so she was full of good will.

"Dear father, you know quite well that Daffy will marry whomever she chooses to marry! And, after all, why not this boy, who is extremely nice and is heir to a really old baronetcy? Aunt Corisande was greatly pleased when he seemed to like her—"

"Seemed to like your Aunt Corisande!" Lambe was ill at ease and his little joke was made to conceal it, but it answered the purpose as a stop-gap, for as he spoke the gong sounded for lunch and the strain was relieved.

Lambe studied Daffy's face with something like jealousy. He did not want her to marry young Macclesfield, nice as the boy was—he did not want her to marry any one. He loved her and he wanted her to stay with him. And Daffy was evidently very glad to see the young man.

He had come straight from Derbyshire, where the Peplow's country house was, and it had been full of people she knew, about most of whom there was some item of news to be given.

"And Cicely Long?"

"Oh, she's going to write to you herself, I'd better not tell you!" returned Macclesfield. But Daffy begged him, her face aglow with interest.

"Ah, do tell me, please, Mr. Macclesfield! I'm sure I can guess, anyhow. She's engaged!"

His laugh confirmed her in her opinion.

"I knew it! But to which?"

Lambe laughed in his turn. "Was the young lady undecided?" he asked, helping himself to Strangle-priest, a giant macaroni. "Flattering for the one she has ultimately decided to honor."

Daffy nodded. "There were three. All *mad* about her. She's awfully pretty, isn't she, Mr. Macclesfield? Well, I am sure it's Captain Lestrangle."

"Wrong."

"Mr. Waring?"

"Wrong again."

Daffy stared. "Then it must be that little Graf Lüttwitz. And *how* she used to laugh at him!"

Macclesfield shook his head again.

"Wrong again. It's a parson chap, just down from Oxford. Dolland or Bolland, I forget his name."

Daffy laid down her fork. "Mr. Gilland! I can't believe it. He has the most *enormous* Adam's apple; he was at dinner there once, and he had a horrible cold and sniffed all the time!"

"He may have got over his cold now," suggested Susan gently. "Cicely will be a dear little parson's wife."

"At least say a parson's dear little wife; Mr. Gilland is eight feet tall at the very least," declared Daffy.

"Let's hope she likes giants, then. When did you leave England, Mr. Macclesfield?" Susan was always very polite, and Macclesfield greatly admired her.

While they were talking, Gunning watched Daffy, who sat on his left.

"You are a wicked minx," he murmured to her, behind his claret glass.

"Me? Why?"

"Poor youth, to let him come all the way out here. I blush for you," he went on.

Now Daffy, the plain one, was the only one of the three girls who was in the least a flirt. Her conscience had hitherto been quite clear regarding Macclesfield, for she had felt from the first that he had a proposal in store for her, but he had come down here without asking her permission, and the moment had come when the eternal mousing instinct was strong with her.

So she interrupted what he was saying to Susan, and by a look and a smile reduced him to silent, miserable hope!

After lunch they went into the grotto by the library and then he lingered on after coffee as it had begun to rain.

Presently Susan rose. "Shall we go into the drawing room, Hughie? That new music has come, the Sinding thing is magnificent."

When they were in the corridor, she added with an indulgent laugh, "I thought we might as well give the poor boy a chance."

Gunning laughed. "She's teasing him," he said. "She is a little brute!"

Susan played for an hour and Gunning sat in a comfortable chair with his eyes shut. Any one looking

in unseen would have thought the little scene a very domestic one, and the thought struck Susan, as it had many times before struck her. He was going back to England the next day but one, and she asked herself, with a rare touch of impatience, whether she should after all have to do the asking!

When they were apart he missed her, so much she knew, for he had often told her; and he depended on her in quite a number of ways. They were the best of friends and she counted on this, for she knew quite well that he did not love her.

Presently he rose and went to the window. The rain had stopped and the sun was coming out. Daffy and her admirer had just come out of the front door and stood in the gravel sweep looking up at the sky.

"I think we'll go to the Cascade Garden," she said, as Gunning came within earshot, "it will be quite dry there."

Gunning came back toward the piano.

"Thanks so much, Susan," he said with a certain constraint in his manner. "It is beautiful stuff. And now, if you will excuse me, I will go and speak to your father."

"Of course, Hughie."

He went to the library where Lambe was still smoking.

"Mr. Lambe," he said hurriedly, "if I can persuade Daffy to marry me, will you give her to me?"

"Daffy? Well, I'm damned!"

"I—It's very sudden, I didn't know till to-day that I wanted to marry her, but I do."

Lambe gave a forlorn little laugh. "Of course I'll say yes, if she does, but——"

"Thank you, sir."

It was the first time since Sylvia's marriage that he had ever called Lambe "sir," and the older man felt that it was an epoch-making episode. Then Gunning left him.



## CHAPTER XXXII

“D AFFY, come for a walk with me?”

Daffy looked up from the large bunch of grapes she was eating in the shade of the pergola.

“Why not sit here, it’s pretty warm for walking.”

“I’d rather walk, if you don’t mind. It’s fairly cool on the Cascade Terrace.”

“All right.”

She rose, and they sauntered through the pergola and off across the lawn, through the gate in the wall.

It was not really very warm, and Gunning thought that she had made the comparative heat of seven o’clock an excuse for avoiding something she did not wish to do.

“Mr. Macclesfield gone away?” he asked presently, looking down at the sedate little figure.

She nodded. “Yes.”

“A nice boy, Daffy.”

“Ugh, that’s what they all say. As if it made a bit of difference!”

Even in his preoccupation he laughed. “But surely it ought to make *some* difference? If I were going to ask you to marry me, I should expect my recognized ‘niceness’ to have some weight with you!”

“Well, it *wouldn’t*, then?”

"Then you'd refuse me without even reflecting!" he went on, feeling his way. She looked absurdly young and immature as she stood still beside the tall, upspringing figure of the Diana.

"No, I shouldn't, Hughie," she answered, taking his hypothesis quite seriously as a matter for thought, but he knew, not dreaming that he was in earnest. "I should *accept* you without even reflecting."

They walked on and after a minute he said, half vexed, half pleased by her unconsciousness, "Do you remember the last time we met before you went to Canada?"

They had reached the Memorial Stone, and she laid her hand on it.

"Do I remember? Of course I do. You were very ill that night, Hughie, and oh, I was so frightened."

"Yes, I was ill," he answered thoughtfully. "I wonder if the remains of the bouquet are still there." He poked in the sandy soil with his stick and then knelt down. "I buried it very deep, I remember, in the tin box it was sent in."

"Poor Hughie!"

"Here it is. Shall we have a look at it, Daffy?"

But Daffy was shy of emotional things, and she hesitated. He looked up, the tin box, half uncovered, at his knees.

"Won't you even look at it?" he asked ruefully, and she at once assented.

"Of course, if you really wish me to."

He dragged the box out of its resting place, dusted it with his handkerchief and opened it.

A brown and piteous object was the bridal bouquet of two years ago, but even now the dried lilies-of-the-valley were recognizable, and in the middle a leaf or two gleamed green.

Gunning looked at the poor thing sadly. "It's like my—my powers of—of loving," he said in a voice that was suddenly harsh with pain. "I—I buried more than flowers here, Daffy." What a fool he had been, he thought, to dream that he could ever get over his old feeling for Sylvia! There was a physical pain near his heart as he rose, the bouquet still in his hand.

"Poor Hughie," Daffy repeated, touching the withered flowers gently. "Why did you dig them up? Put them back in the box and we'll bury it again."

There was genuine pity in her voice and face, but it was the pity of a child for some incomprehensible, grown-up grief.

"Don't be silly, Daffy," he cried, impatient not of her words but of her youthfulness. He had spoken sharply to her on more than one occasion, and several times in her life he had seriously admonished her. But this was the first time his voice had been devoid of the tenderness due to a child; he spoke to her as to a foolish woman, and it hurt.

Her upper lip drew up in the middle and gave a little quiver.

Gunning's heart jumped. She was so like Sylvia at that moment. It hurt him, as it always had done, but it was a luxurious kind of hurt.

"Daffy, listen to me," he said, taking her hand. "I am sorry I was cross. You don't understand,

quite. You know how much I loved Sylvia, and, young as you are, you must realize that no man on earth can care like that *twice*."

"Of course he couldn't. Oh, Hughie, I hate to have you be unhappy," she interrupted hurriedly, "but I *do* appreciate your never forgetting her. It is a pity and yet, I like it, somehow."

"Yes, yes, I know, dear. But what I want to say to you is this: I never can love any one as much, or in the same way again, but I am so very fond of you; I wonder if you could marry me?"

Daffy stared at him until her eyes grew strained-looking.

"I marry you? But Hughie, why on earth should you want to marry me?"

"But I do want to, dear. And—well, could you?"

"Of course I could, Hughie. I suppose I must marry some day, and I'd far rather it were you than any one else. If you're quite *sure*?"

She was portentously serious. Her little lip still quivered. His heart smote him. What right had he to take advantage of her ignorance, of her childish affection for him?

Then his eyes fell on the tiny cluster of still glossy green leaves in the ruin of the bouquet.

"Look here, Daffy," he said, pulling them out. "This is a bit of myrtle; I brought the plant back with me from Germany nine years ago, and kept it growing all that time, so that I should have a sprig for Sylvia's bouquet. It means fidelity. Well, the rest of the bouquet has gone, but this bit of fidelity is

still green. Some things have gone from—from my heart, dear, because I was too badly hurt, and because I had loved her for so long. But perhaps there is still a bit of green left in it somewhere. Daffy, I believe there is, dear. Will you risk it?"

She took the sprig of myrtle and put its stem through two holes of embroidery in her blouse.

"Why, Hughie, of course I will. Only I don't think it's a risk at all, with you. Do you know I've been dreading marrying ever since an American boy in Japan asked me to marry *him*. And now it won't be awful at all!"

"Thank you, my dear. I will try my best to make you happy."

"*Of course* I shall be happy! And father will be perfectly delighted, I know he will. He said in London that he wished you'd marry Susan, but I never had any hopes of *that*."

"No, Susan and I are very good friends, but we neither of us could——"

"I told him that. You're *too* good friends," she agreed, proud of her penetration.

Before she went back to the villa, Daffy knelt and buried the tin box with its handful of withered leaves, but the myrtle she left in her breast.

Christopher Lambe was delighted and consented to a short engagement.

"I wish it were Susan," he said, while Daffy sat on his knee with her arms round his neck. "Then I might have kept my 'boy' here, a little longer. But she's the dearest thing I have in the world, Hughie,

and I'm glad to give her into your hands. As for you—she's worth ten Sylvias and Susans."

As for Susan, they found her in her own sitting-room writing letters.

"Susan," Daffy cried from the doorway, "we have news for you!"

And Susan Lambe had one second in which to arrange her facial expression before she had to rise and face them.

"News?" she asked quietly.

"Guess!"

"Well—from your faces I should say—surely, Hughie, you aren't going to marry that baby!"

It was admirably done, the good-natured banter appeared to them both to cover only good-will and friendly interest.

"I am, Susan. But the wonderful thing is that 'that baby' has been able to make up her mind to marry an old man like me, when she might have had young Macclesfield!"

Daffy darted an angry glance at him.

"You have no right to say I might have married Mr. Macclesfield, Hughie. I'm sure he didn't tell you so, and I didn't either."

Susan laughed. "Now run away, you two dear people, and finish your first quarrel downstairs, if you don't mind. I *must* catch the post, and then I'll come down and join you."

When they had gone, she locked the door very softly and sat down at her desk.

She did not go downstairs for a full hour, and

when she did, and met her father, he drew a breath of relief. He had almost feared she would not take it well, but her manner quite set him at rest. Susan, it appeared, looked on the marriage as a somewhat experimental one, Hughie being thirty-four and Daffy not yet twenty; but she was so fond of Hughie, and he was so good in every way, that she couldn't help being pleased.

"You must grow up now, little sister," she said to Daffy, with a kiss. "You are to have an important rôle in London."

Gunning himself was happy enough. Daphne was a dear little thing and she pleased him. As to loving her, or any other woman, as he had loved Sylvia, this he knew could never be. And Daffy, not being in love with him, would be easy to please in the matter of devotion. She would not be jealous or too demonstrative.

But he remembered how his heart had stirred when for a moment she had really looked like Sylvia, and resolved not to see his sister-in-law again. He would run no risks. Her hold over him, unconscious though it was, was too strong still.

He went to sleep making this determination and then dreamed of Sylvia all night.

Daffy for her part was greatly pleased and even more flattered.

It would be splendid to have dear old Hughie for a husband, he was such a dear and not a bit fussy. No doubt he'd let her go with her father to Cashmere as they had been planning. "And he will never bother

me with love-making," she sighed to her pillow just as she dropped off.

And this was the manner in which came about the marriage, noticed in the *Morning Post* one day in August, as having taken place at Sorrento, of Daphne Lambe to Hugh John Gunning.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

**I**T is difficult to describe Daphne Gunning as she was during the first two years of her marriage.

The years themselves were not uneventful, inasmuch as they included several happenings that would count as important to any young woman; the taking a house in London, the furnishing of it in her own way; the settling of her little household at Draycott End, the house Gunning had bought for Sylvia; the meeting and entertaining of many important men in London, for Gunning was looked on in the political world as a rising young man.

All these things Daffy enjoyed in a way, although her furnishing of the house in South Audley Street turned out to be a failure and had, finally, to be entirely done over by the busy Gunning himself; although Draycott End was dull without the companionable sea, and her first sojourn there was marked by a disastrous row with the Vicar's wife, settled by an apology from a furious Mrs. Gunning, who said bluntly that she had come because her husband made her; although political talk proved to be as hopelessly beyond her comprehension as it was beyond that of her father, who never could remember who the Prime Minister was.

In spite of these little mishaps and drawbacks, how-

ever, Daffy wrote to her father from time to time that she liked her new life very well.

"Hugh is a dear, although so solemn," she added once, with the disproportionate result that Christopher Lambe at once left his beautiful quiet Sorrento and came hot-foot to the London he detested. He found the young couple at lunch.

"I thought I'd come, that's all," he repeated, in answer to their surprise, "I just thought I'd come, that's all." But that evening he lectured Gunning in his own way.

"You've been married five months," he said, "and she hasn't changed a bit."

Gunning stared. "Well, surely you didn't want her to change?"

"But I did. Every young girl who marries ought to change at first. She ought to become a violent imitator of her husband, an airer of his views; the man ought to put his stamp on her while the iron's hot. Then, a little later," he added dryly, "as the metal cools, the new stamp might, and usually *does*, become fainter. Iron to receive and wax to retain, you know."

"Then I don't see the use——"

"Exactly. You don't see the use! My poor Hughie, that is just the trouble. But there is a use. It's a phase that ought to be gone through, my boy. You marry a child like Daffy and then let her grow up all in her own way. You'll be sorry later."

But Daffy would not have understood her father. Hughie had always been like that, kind and busy with

things beyond her ken. She had lost nothing by marrying him, and she had won much. It was great fun being Mrs. Gunning and having parties, even though the parties themselves rather bored her. Thus she went her way, and her way was in itself a perfectly harmless and safe one.

She was given to long walks, even in town, she visited all by herself historic places that interested her, she looked at pictures.

Then, when she had been married nearly a year, she made a friend, her first real friend after her husband, whom she always had, and still did, look on in that light. Old Mr. Wace was a Charterhouse pensioner. He lived in a small room over the archway, and Daffy discovered him one spring day when she was roaming about all alone.

Mr. Wace, who carried a bunch of primroses in his left hand, and leaned on a strong, black stick with the other, was a tall, bent, white-haired old man, with a beautiful hooked nose.

When Daffy stared at him he smiled faintly. He was quite used to being thought "so like poor dear Colonel Newcombe." The little girl in the smart blue coat and skirt looked hard at him for a moment and then came nearer.

"How do you do?" she said shyly.

"How do you do?" returned Mr. Wace, sniffing at his primroses.

"I wonder if you'd think me very rude—" began Daffy, but he interrupted her with a wave of his fine old hand.

"If you said I was like Colonel Newcombe? Oh, no, so many say it; chiefly Americans."

Daffy's stare changed to one almost of stupidity. "Who's Colonel Newcombe?" she asked gruffly.

Mr. Wace was delighted, and when he found that she only wished to ask him for a primrose as she had not seen any that year, his delight knew no bounds.

He had more in his room; a lot more; they had been sent to him by a friend in Devon. Would Daffy let him give her those he carried? Daffy was delighted and pinned the friendly things into her coat, and after a few remarks about the beauty of the day, she went away, leaving the old man in the sun, alone.

A few days later she came back, bringing a basket of violets that she had bought in Covent Garden, one of her favorite haunts. She waited for a long time in the quiet quadrangles, but no Mr. Wace appeared, and at last she met a functionary in an official cap, and explained her difficulty.

"He says he's always called Colonel—somebody—out of a book," she explained, and the functionary knew at once whom she meant.

"Oh, yes, Miss, that'll be Mr. Wace. If you'll just step along with me, I'll take you to his room. The old gentleman has been rather poorly—a bad cold, I believe."

Daffy stepped along and found the old man sitting by his window reading "Masterman Ready."

He was very glad to see her; it was more than kind of her to come and see him; the violets did his old heart good.

She sat down by him and he showed her all his treasures. A picture of his mother (judging by the remarkable plainness of whom he must have taken after his father); a poisoned arrow from Africa; his few books, all well worn; two stuffed parrots mounted on strangely glittering trees, presumably tropical; a velvet smoking cap; three pipes, one from the Tyrol; and his flowered tea service, a gift from some friends. He was a strangely impersonal old man. He named, in all the subsequent talk, no names, no addresses. Daffy never learned what he had been, before Charterhouse took him to her kind but melancholy bosom; she never knew whence he came; only one thing she learned, and that was destined to be of great importance to her. Mr. Wace was a widower and his wife had been an angel.

The story was told to her one dark day when her second wedding anniversary was only a few months off.

It had amused Daffy that the old man should, in spite of her ring, always take her girlhood for granted. Several times, in the slowly ripening intimacy, he had referred to "when your time comes to marry, my dear!" And, out of mischief, she had not enlightened him. She had perhaps come half a dozen times in all to see her friend, when he told her his story.

It was a raw, dark day, and behind snugly drawn curtains, they were drinking tea. Daffy was feeling very tired; she had had bronchitis, and was not yet quite strong, she said.

Mr. Wace was a little silent that day and Daffy did not resent his mood. Silence was no hardship to her, and she sat stirring her tea, quite at ease, while the nickel clock ticked the minutes away.

Suddenly she coughed, and the old man waked with a start from his reverie.

"You—you have a cough," he stammered, reaching across the table and laying his hand on hers.

"Yes, not a bad one. I told you I have just had bronchitis, you know."

"But, you must go away. You must go away at once," he cried with rising excitement.

Daffy shook her head. "Aren't you ashamed to be so inhospitable? Look at the fog!"

"Out of England I mean, away out of the fog and the wet."

"Oh, no, I can't do that."

"But why not? Surely your father is rich? Oh, you *must* go, and at once, before it is too late!"

He was very much in earnest and his white old face, like that of a waxen image, so old that its color had faded, flushed quickly. "Oh, my dear, do not waste time," he said, "tell your father what I say. I am right, oh, I am right, God knows! Go, before it is too late."

He covered his face for a moment with his hands and when he looked up, Daffy was smiling gently at him, as one who smiles at an excited child.

"Don't laugh, dear Miss Gunning," he said, suddenly quite calm, "old people sometimes know things. And I, alas, know this only too well. If I had known

it all thirty years ago, I should not be the lonely old pensioner you see to-day."

"You mean, some one died? Your wife?" Daffy's voice was very gentle.

"Yes, my wife. Oh, my dear. It is forty years ago to-day that we were married. Forty years; and for thirty of them I have been alone."

Daffy watched him, the firelight in her dark eyes.

"She was a lady, my dear, a delicate, beautiful lady, and it was in—in a cold old church in the south that we met that morning, and were married. Her people had forbidden it, but she did not care. She was not a girl—thirty years old, five years younger than I, and she knew her own mind, she said. And that she did. I had no money and no position. We came here to London together; third-class it was, but what did that matter to her? Her spirit was as strong as her lovely body was delicate. 'It didn't matter,' she said. It didn't matter her having only a sandwich for her lunch, it didn't matter walking from the station to the bus, and then sitting for half-an-hour on top in the rain. It didn't matter her having to live up three pairs of stairs in dark rooms. Nothing mattered, she said, and I, poor fool, believed her. How could I know that in one thing, she, as truthful as the angels themselves in everything else, should, in this one point, lie, lie, lie her own beautiful life away?"

His face flushed and his thin lips worked nervously. "It was for me she did it, so that I should not 'worry.' Worry—my God!—I who would have carried her in my arms to the warm sunlight she needed, if I had

not believed what she always told me—that it didn't matter!"

Daffy took his hand in hers. "She must have loved you very much," she said.

The old man smiled. "Yes, she loved me. When the baby was at last coming and her cough was so bad, she used to look at me with eyes, with such beautiful mother eyes, that mothered me as much as the baby. And when the cough grew worse and worse, she always said it didn't matter. You see, if she had gone away, I couldn't have stayed with her. I was busy, and if I had gone, I should have lost my position."

"Perhaps," suggested Daffy, stumbling on the truth out of her black ignorance, "she preferred the little while with you to a longer life without you."

He nodded. "Yes, she knew it was consumption, the doctor told her. She wouldn't let him tell me. And—it is just as you say—she liked better the two or three months with me to stay a year without me. She lived to see the baby, and then before I had to tell her that the poor little thing had died, she—she coughed again and went to sleep and never woke up. The neighbors said I was brutal to her, that it was my fault she died. I let 'em talk. She knew and God knew. But oh, the loneliness——"

He broke off, his noble old face a mask, in that it gave promise of more than his life had fulfilled, very beautiful in its sadness.

Daffy broke the ensuing silence by another cough, and he came back to the present with a start.

"So you see, Miss Gunning, you must take care of



your cough. You *will* go away to the sun, won't you?"

Daffy shook her head. "Mr. Wace, do you mind talking about her? I like to hear."

And the reticent old man, probably glad that the ice was broken, talked on in the firelit dusk.

Daffy never forgot that hour. The old man's voice went on and on, unrolling before her eyes a scroll of lovely old memories, a record of real, true love, such as she had never in her life seen. Depths of tenderness possible between wedded lovers were shown to her; little old pet-names told, little incidents, all cherished for forty years in almost unbroken silence.

Probably the old man forgot that he was speaking aloud, for the room got darker and Daffy did not move. He told of the prayers his wife and he had prayed for the coming baby, how they asked God to make him good and brave and strong; of their plans for educating him, of how they were to save every penny to ensure the luxury of knowledge for him.

"She liked churches; we used to go to St. Olave's and sit there in the afternoons, when I could get off. She liked the oldness of it, and the kneeling citizens and their wives on the tombs, and the bust of Pepys' wife—he was a man that wrote a diary in Queen Elizabeth's time," he added—and the ignorant Daffy could not correct him. "And once we came in here, and she walked round leaning on my arm. We didn't know then that I should one day be one of the old men in cloaks, whom she liked so much. When I had to

come, six years ago," he went on, again realizing his listener's existence, "I was glad that she had been here. I can see, from my window there, the place where she sat down to rest, in the gateway. She was tired, she said, but it didn't matter! Well, we had ten perfect years, and the last was the best, for then the baby was coming at last. We had a rather better home by that time, only one pair of stairs and a good view over a square, where trees grew. But I lost money that year again. I thought I might take a little risk for *his* sake, and they fooled me. I was never clever. And when I had to tell her that I couldn't give her the white lacquered 'pram' we had picked out in a shop window, she said——"

"She said it didn't matter, of course," added Daffy, "and it *didn't*. Little things," added the sage, "only matter when one hasn't a *big* thing, and she had you."

Old Mr. Wace reached for her hand. "You are right," he said, patting it. "That's just what she *did* say. But,—yes, she was happy, thank God and all His angels. Ah, my dear, when you marry, be sure you get the *right man*. I was weak, and unlucky and ignorant, but I was Lily's *right man*. It is that that counts the most after all. You are so young, you might make a mistake. Be very careful." The solemnity in his voice gave her a little pang.

"But, Mr. Wace, do you think every one is capable of—of feeling what you felt? For instance, I know a girl who married such a nice man, and he is very good to her, and she is extremely fond of him. Oh, yes, extremely. Only, it isn't at all like what you have

been telling me. I mean to say, she never could say, 'it doesn't matter,' to things——"

Suddenly the old man lost his temper. He was seventy-five years old and very frail.

"Nonsense, nonsense," he exclaimed sharply. "Liking doesn't mean anything. A woman may like a hundred men. If she doesn't love her husband, then it's all wrong, all wrong, I tell you. And there's danger all round her. Don't you ever let any one you like, persuade you to marry him. You are the kind who can really love—not all women can—and you could say 'it doesn't matter,' for the right man. Wait till he comes, my dear. You'll know. Only don't be in a hurry. Wait, I tell you, wait!"

He was very much excited and Daffy had some difficulty in quieting him. When at last she left, she had not undeceived him. He still believed her to be Miss Gunning.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

**D**AFFY went home in a rather thoughtful mood. The old man had impressed her and her mind went back at once to Sylvia. Gunning could have said, 'it doesn't matter,' to nearly everything for Sylvia's sake and Sylvia could for Gianfranco's.

But could she, Daffy, say it for Gunning? She knew quite well that she could not. So many things mattered to her. As a wife, obviously, she was a failure.

That night after dinner, she said to her husband, "I say, Hughie, aren't you ever sorry you married me?"

Gunning laid down his book. "My dear child, what a very funny question! No, of course I'm not."

"Oh, I only wondered, that's all."

"But what made my dear little girl think of such a stupid thing?"

He smiled gravely at her as she sat on the arm of a carved chair, swinging her legs and gazing at him.

"Oh, I don't know! I was talking to a man to-day who had had a wife who was very different from me. He was telling me about her, and it made me wonder."

Gunning laughed, and as he passed her on his way to the door, he bent and kissed her.

"Every man to his taste, you know," he said.

She jumped down from the chair arm, and looked up at him.

"Yes, only I don't happen to be your 'taste' really, and I feel somehow that I—I ought to do something to make you happier."

A little frown passed over his face, leaving a smile on it.

"Surely, you don't mean that? As for your not being—why should I have asked you to marry me if I hadn't been very fond of you?"

"Oh, I know you like me. And I like you, Hughie, indeed I do," she returned earnestly.

It is to be observed that old Mr. Wace's story had roused in her no sense of any deficiency on Gunning's part, only a kind of vague remorse for her own inability to feel that things did not matter.

Gunning had important work to be done before he went to the House, but he stood still and looked down at her with a very kind expression in his blue eyes.

"Of course you do, my dear. And please believe that in spite of what your friend has been telling you, I can't think of any one I'd so like as my wife."

"Except Sylvia," she retorted indiscreetly.

There was not in her the remotest approach to jealousy. The knowledge that he loved Sylvia had grown with her growth and become an integral part of her life. She mentioned her sister now merely because he seemed to have made a misstatement.

To her surprise he flushed. "You have no right to suggest that I have any feeling for another man's wife beyond that, which, as my sister-in-law, I owe

her," he said severely. "You are too old to be so childish, Daphne." To say that he marched out of the room would hardly be overstating the case. And Daffy, naturally, was left behind with a dismal feeling of having made a fool of herself.

"Poor old Hughie, what a beast I was," she said aloud, "fancy his *mind*ing my knowing!"

She was very sorry for her husband; her feelings for him had changed not one whit since her marriage. He was still dear old Hughie to her, although her mind accepted and indeed rather overestimated his importance in the world, so that he was a rather great man to her as well as a dear, and a poor dear. She sent for her dogs and set to work continuing their education in the matter of tricks.

Gunning, meanwhile, sat in his study, his papers lying untouched before him, his head on his hand. Daffy had no business to touch on his old grief in that careless way. She had about her a curious touch of roughness, such as young boys often have. Surely he had done nothing to make her think he regretted his marriage. As a matter of fact he did not regret it, although the little flash of emotion that had bade him hope the evening of his engagement had never come again.

He was a very busy man and he loved work, but he had honestly tried to make his little wife happy. He had given her many things, and now his mind turned to the subject of a present he might make her to comfort her. Why she needed comforting he did not attempt to guess, but it appeared to him that he had

failed in his efforts to satisfy her, and he wished to make amends.

Having decided on a little diamond bulldog he had seen in a shop window the day before, he went back to his work with a sigh of relief. How lucky that she was sufficiently a child to enjoy diamond bulldogs!

But when he came home late that night, he found Mariana, Daffy's Italian maid, waiting up for him. Daffy was ill.

Going into his wife's room he found her feverish and in pain, her hand pressed to her chest.

"I'm so sorry, Hughie," she gasped, "but I can't breathe, I feel as if an—elephant were sitting on—my—chest."

It was very late, but Gunning at once sent for the doctor and then, while he waited, sat by Daffy and tried to make her more comfortable.

"He *said* I mustn't stay in this climate," she broke out, "that's what killed her. Only, it doesn't matter. I say, Hughie," she added, sitting bolt upright and clasping her hot hands round his arm, "I *do* wish I wasn't such a goose. Or that I was better looking. I'm not a bit of good as a wife, and I'm sorry."

Her fever was very high. When the doctor came he looked grave, and declared simply that his patient seemed to be in for pneumonia. Poor Daffy, she was very ill indeed, and when at last she was announced to be out of danger, she was so weak that she couldn't even speak.

Her delirious dreams had been pleasant rather than

otherwise, for she seemed back in the years with old Mr. Wace and his Lily, only he was young Mr. Wace and looked exactly like the second secretary to the Russian Embassy. Their happiness was so beautiful, the only sad part of it all was Daffy's inability to stave off the disaster that only she saw to be coming. Her talk was constantly that Lily *must* go away; that it *did* matter; that Lily could not stand the cold and the wet, and must go away. "Don't let her say it doesn't matter," she begged the nurse, "it *does* matter and he ought to be told."

On this point she insisted so strongly that the doctor at last asked Gunning if she could not have her way.

"Can't you tell 'him,' whoever he is, that 'Lily' must go away? If Mrs. Gunning could be made to understand that 'Lily' *has* gone away, her mind might be able to rest."

"But, Sir John, I haven't the least idea of whom she is talking. I know no one named Lily, and she has never mentioned to me a friend of hers of that name. I—" he broke off, his troubled eyes fixed on the birthday knights!

Sir John shrugged his shoulders. "She is evidently fond of 'Lily,'" he said dryly and went away, leaving Gunning convinced that the great man was blaming him for his reprehensible ignorance of his young wife's interests.

He was very kind and devoted to Daffy, notwithstanding the doctor's views. Even his beloved work was neglected for the worst days of the illness.



Lady Corisande told every one how tragic to behold was his grief.

"He wanders round the house like a piteous ghost," she declared, "I had no idea he was so in love with the funny little thing." But then Lady Corisande always presented her relatives in the most becoming light possible.

Sir John Wilcox, on the other hand, confided to his wife that for his part he'd hate to have Escott (his son-in-law) take as little interest in Julia's doings as Mr. Gunning took in his wife's.

"Doesn't seem to know who her most intimate friends are, even," he added, drinking beer out of a silver cup, the gift of a grateful German serenity.

And so vast is the vastness of London, that when events occurred that settled forever the question of Gunning's feelings for his wife, Sir John and Lady Wilcox never learned in what way the question was decided.

"A sea voyage would be the best thing," Sir John told his patient's husband, "a long, warm sea voyage. Say—the West Indies. No, her lungs aren't really affected, but she is very delicate, Mr. Gunning."

Gunning reflected a moment. "She might go to her father's in Sorrento. I could take her there and come back."

But Sir John enjoyed enforcing the use of a prescription in which he did most thoroughly believe.

"I should not advise that. The journey would be far better. She ought not to think of coming back here before May at the earliest. Let me see, this is the

sixteenth of December. Why don't you go to Ceylon? Kandy would be excellent just now, and a little later that place in the hills."

"I know Ceylon well," said Gunning gloomily, "but——"

"Good. Then let us decide on Ceylon. She likes traveling, she tells me."

"Yes."

"Then, good morning."

"Good morning, Sir John." Two excellent men shook hands, detesting each other cordially, and Gunning, after a few minutes' reflection, went up to Daffy's room.

It was a very pretty room now that he had done away with the furniture of her choosing, and it looked pleasant enough in the firelight.

Daffy lay on a couch, wrapped in a shell-colored dressing gown and covered with an eider-down. Her little face was smaller than ever, her hands on the silk looked like faded petals of some white flower.

"Well, my dear," he began, kissing her. "What do you think of a journey to Ceylon?"

Her answer startled him. "Dear me," she said, without opening her eyes, "am I *that* bad?"

"How do you mean, dear?"

She had meant, quite unresentfully, just what she said. Only very great necessity could drag him from his work.

"Don't you think some place nearer might do?" she asked. "It's a pity for you to have to go."

"That doesn't matter," he answered kindly.

She was very weak and the words reminded her of her dream friends, Mr. Wace and Lily.

"Doesn't matter," she repeated, and two big tears rolled quietly down her wasted cheeks.

Poor Gunning was overwhelmed with remorse, for he knew not what.

Kneeling by the couch, he took her little body in his arms and laid his cheek close to hers.

"My dear, what is it? Don't you wish to go? I thought it would be—be so delightful."

He stumbled a little over the lie, but surely it was not counted as a lie against him.

She did not answer for a moment and then she whispered, "Father can take me."

But Gunning possessed a strong sense of duty. Dearly as he loved his work, he felt that this little creature he had married deserved his care and his time.

"Certainly not," he returned promptly, "I will take you unless you wish me *not* to?" The question, put playfully, she answered with the monumental gravity that had amused him in her as a child.

"Oh, Hughie, you know I'll *love* to have you take me. And it *is* so good of you."

So it was settled. Lambe, who was in Transylvania, came back, on receipt of Gunning's first wire, without waiting for the following quieting ones, and found the travelers eating their last dinner before leaving England.

When Daffy had gone to bed, the two men sat smoking.

"Poor wee thing, how awfully bad she looks even yet," Lambe began, with a voice that was not quite steady.

"Yes, she was very ill. But the doctors say the sea air will soon set her up. Besides, you know she loves traveling and is so interested, it's bound to do her good."

"Yes, she's a good traveler."

"She's got all sorts of queer things to take, enough tropical contrivances to last for a year. Also she has a very fat book on 'Ceylon and Its Inhabitants,' which she is already studying profoundly. Dear little Daffy."

Christopher Lambe's usually vague eyes were very intent for a moment.

"Yes, she really likes books about places—few people do—I envy you taking her there, it's a beautiful place."

"I say, Lambe, why don't you come with us?" Gunning's heartiness was plainly visible. "She would love it, and so should I. Do come."

Lambe's face flushed eagerly for a moment. "By Jove, I should enjoy it, I could get what I need in Marseilles—" and then he broke off short. "No, no, I won't come, Hughie; thanks, all the same."

"But why? I am very little good as a companion for her, you know, and you would keep her from being lonely. Do come."

"No, I will not come." Lambe rose, for it was late. "I'll go to bed now if you don't mind. And, I say,

Gunning, she is very young, and very ignorant, but you mustn't let her be lonely, you know."

Gunning was silent. The two men thoroughly understood each other and he knew why his father-in-law had decided not to go.

"You are right," he said simply, as they shook hands, "she mustn't be lonely. I'll do my best."

## CHAPTER XXXV

**D**'AFFY came out of the bungalow Gunning had taken, up beyond the Galle Face Hotel, and stood on the portico steps looking out over the freshly sprinkled sweep of red soil from under the moonflowers that gave the house its name.

The day had been very warm, and now the moon, a huge, orange-colored globe, rode high, showering the earth with its light.

To the left of the door stood the rickshaws, their boys loafing in the shadow, only their white loin-cloths clearly visible.

Daffy wore white and round her neck gleamed a single string of not very large, but very perfect, pearls, Gunning's "getting-well" gift.

She was much better than she had been on leaving England a month ago, but in the moonlight her little face looked still delicate and her waist might almost have been clasped by some large woman's bracelet.

"Hughie."

As she spoke, the boys emerged from their shadow and hastened to her with many bends of willowy brown backs. One boy was young and handsome, the other was old, toothless and sad-looking.

Daffy waved them away and explained to them in English that she had not called them.

Presently Gunning, in his shirt-sleeves, came to his window far down the portico. "Yes, dear, what is it?"

"We shall be late, it's half-past eight already."

Gunning came toward her. "The mail's in," he explained, "and I had two cablegrams to write. I ought to get out my code book and send another. Suppose you go on without me, and I'll come as soon as I can?"

Daffy nodded. "All right. You'll come as soon as you can? I'll tell Mrs. Harscamp—any important news from home?"

He smiled. "No, dear, only political. Oh, yes, Mrs. Harscamp will understand; mail day has privileges out here. Hi, boy!"

Both boys raced forward, pulling their rubber-tired vehicles, and Daffy seated herself in that of the old man.

"Do come soon, Hughie, they're sure to talk of things I don't understand. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, dear, I shan't be more than half an hour behind you."

He stood for a moment listening to the soft padding of the boy's feet as he tore down the avenue, and then went back to his work.

The Galle Face Road was not now so full of rick-shaws as it had been a few minutes before, but still there were many people to be seen. Fat natives boiling over the narrow vehicle's seat, and blurring their

outline, men and women in evening dress, the newcomers in vain trying to look unconscious of their unaccustomed conveyance, belated tourists in topees tearing home to dinner. The lights bobbed merrily along the wide, red road, the moonlight in its calm strength seeming to draw their strength from them, and on the left, swept in slowly the enormously long, oily waves of the ocean, breaking like cream on the sand.

A group of huge, bearded Afghans in towering turbans inspected Daffy gravely as she passed; on a bench was huddled a sleeping Chinaman; a closed native carriage with gilded slats grated along, drawn by two bullocks.

It was a variegated and interesting scene and Daffy loved it.

She wished, however, that her boy's ribs were not so painfully prominent and his knot of oiled hair not so scant and gray. It is sad that the Cingalee coolie never ceases to be a boy till he dies. The Tamils, big black men, are better runners, but the little Cingalese appealed more to the girl by reason of their slight alertness and their pathetic eyes, and whenever she could, she engaged them.

Her rickshaw had left the scattered crowd now and was bowling along at the end of the promenade, where it merges into the bi-villa'd road leading to the town.

Suddenly Daffy heard a sound of singing; a light and musical baritone voice singing one of the few songs she could distinguish: "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby," it went very sweet.



Thoroughly unmusical people often have what they call a favorite song, and this, whether from association or because she was subconsciously proud of recognizing it when they met, was Daffy's.

She stopped putting on her gloves—always a tiresome and lengthy task on a warm evening in Colombo—and, calling to her boy, made him understand that he was to go slower. Then she leaned forward and looked out into the shadows for the singer.

He was some distance ahead of her, and he was walking. She could see a tall, broad figure all in white on her left, and now, in the almost deserted road, he was singing louder. His voice was a most sweet one, with a beguiling cadence that Daffy felt, though she could not have explained it.

“‘And charm thee to a tear.’”

But it was late and she must not tarry, so at another sign, the rickshaw shot past the singer, leaving him still charming some one to a tear. He turned as the rickshaw passed him, but Daffy did not look at him. Her left glove refused absolutely to go on, and she was engaged in a heated struggle with it.

A minute later she dragged it off in a fury, and a flash of something for a second dulled the moonlight.

“Stop, boy, stop, my ring! Stop, I say.”

The boy stopped slowly, showing his unlovely gums, and Daffy got out.

Her glove had, in coming off, jerked from her thin finger her diamond engagement ring. Lifting up her skirts to save them from the red dust, she went back a few steps and began her search.

"I beg your pardon, but is this your ring?"

It was the singer and in his brown palm lay the ring.

"It fell at my very feet," he explained, "don't you want it any more?"

Daffy blundered into speech, shy as usual with strangers.

"Oh, thank you so much; yes, of course I want it—how good of you—I couldn't get my glove on, you see, so I tore it off—the glove, I mean, and the ring flew off, too."

She held out her hand and her little finger just touched his as she took the ring. Then she looked up and he smiled at her, and her shyness fled and she felt as if she had known him all her life.

"I must hurry, I'm going to a dinner, and am late already."

He bowed, still smiling. "I have a letter of introduction to Mr. Gunning, and may I introduce myself? I'm Nicholas Skene, tea-planter and black sheep—very much at your service."

"Oh, you are Mr. Skene! Yes, I know, my husband told me. You are Mrs. Harscamp's friend."

He glanced quickly at her, but her face was innocent of all second meaning.

"Yes, Harscamp has been very good to me. I'm dining there to-night. I wonder if by any lucky chance, you are, too!"

Daffy sped on to the Grand Oriental, her mind full of pleasant interest. So this was Nicko Skene and he was also dining with the Harscamps!

"How nice to have somebody young there," she thought childishly. "I do wish he'll be somewhere near me. How beautiful he is. I do hope Hughie can do something for him. I'm sure he'll try—he looks so like Sylvia."

Nicko Skene was indeed, as she said, beautiful. In another generation I should perforce describe him as being like a Greek God. His head, set on a strong neck, was small and well shaped, his fair hair curled closely around it, and his pellucid violet gray eyes were twice as large as most people's, although the smooth, long lids were lazily heavy. Disastrous eyes they were, with ready tears behind them, the tears that do not gall, but blur the brightness of the eyes and hang pathetically on the lashes.

His well-molded chin betokened character and firmness, his straight nose was quite classic, and his mouth, smooth and of a pleasant dark red color, was clear cut and sank deep at the corners. A magnificent face, noble and strong.

And its owner was without doubt the most out-and-out scoundrel in the island. This discrepancy is unusual, because scoundrelism does not usually belie itself in expression. But so it was.

When Daffy sat down at the table in the restaurant of the G. O. H., Skene, to her joy, was next her. On her left sat her host, Mr. Theodore Harscamp, an anglicized Belgian, a fat, cheerful man with a bibulous nose, which in this case did not belie its owner.

The room was packed with diners, but kept fairly cool with electric punkahs. In the little gallery an

orchestra played, not too loud, and the dinner was good.

Mrs. Harscamp, a handsome woman with the pallid complexion of women who have been long enough in a hot climate, had on her right and left a yachting peer, red-bearded and taciturn, and an empty chair—Gunning's chair.

On Harscamp's left sat a middle-aged woman in a high black frock, and between Gunning's chair and Skene was a very pretty, frizzy-haired girl, whose name Daffy had not caught, but whom every one in the party called Violet.

It was a merry little party, much more amusing, Daffy reflected, than London dinners. Every one talked island shop, and shop is always interesting when not proffered in too large doses.

Harscamp told her who the people at the neighboring tables were, several local celebrities, one or two travelers of importance; the pretty fair girl with the ear trumpet was Rosie Waldron of the Gaiety, now Lady Lenvick; the tall man with the very large nose was a political demagogue on his way home from India where he had succeeded in stirring up a certain amount of disaffection among the ever-ready natives.

"Frozen to death in the Red Sea, one or two of my fellows nearly died," declared the yachting peer, suddenly after a long period of silence.

Then Gunning arrived, was forgiven by his hostess, and Daffy found herself listening to young Skene's description of what his life was on his tea plantation.

"Only excitement is mail day, you know, and as the

new Governor is a merry soul, an occasional ball at Government House. Lots of pretty girls, but they generally go home just as one gets fond of 'em. Violet's going next month," he added, glancing at his pretty neighbor.

"And are you fond of her?" laughed Daffy.

"Not I. Pretty, isn't she? Good sort, too, but—" he shrugged his shoulders.

"What does that mean?"

"Tar-brush. Her great-grandmother was as black as your hat."

Daffy stared at the other girl, who was fairer than she herself.

"No, it can't be true!"

"But it is!"

"How very sad! I suppose it will hurt her all her life, won't it?"

"Not it. She'll go home and marry some chap who doesn't know the East, and all will go merry as a church bell—what d'ye call it?—marriage bell—unless luck should go against her and she should have a black baby."

He smiled gaily as he made these tragic revelations, and Daffy forgot his subject as she watched his face.

Harscamp had a rubber plantation to sell. "I want to get rid of it and take Mabel home," he explained, with an affectionate glance at his pretty wife. "She's had about enough of it out here, haven't you, old girl?"

Mrs. Harscamp nodded. "I have indeed, Jim. I

suppose," turning to Gunning, "*you* don't want to buy a rubber plantation?"

"No, thanks. I am a tourist, plain and simple."

"Perhaps Mrs. Gunning would like to motor out to Black Hill and see the harvest?" suggested Harscamp, who liked Daffy.

"Oh, I should love it!"

"It's a pretty place, and it's rather interesting the way the trees are tapped, if one's never seen it. By Jove," added Skene animatedly, "I wish I had a few thousands, and I'd buy Black Hill. It's one of the very best plantations in the island, and rubber is going up as sure as eggs is eggs."

"Going up where?" inquired Daffy.

He laughed and explained, to her further bewilderment. After dinner they went out into the garden and listened to the band playing under a huge and beautiful tree.

It was a very pretty scene, and Nicko Skene sat by Daffy and told her stories about the island.

Before the party broke up it was settled on the following Thursday the Harscamps and Skene were to take the Gunnings to their tea plantation, as Gunning found Black Hill too far away for Daffy, for a day or two.

"You'll like it," Skene told Daffy as he walked by her to her rickshaw. "It's a lovely place. I say," he added boyishly, "I *am* glad you lost your ring and that I found it."

"Are you? Why?"

"Well, it seems a good omen for our friendship,

you to lose something valuable and me to restore it to you."

They shook hands and Daffy laughed.

"I literally threw it at you," she answered. "You really couldn't restore it to me."

"I don't know. I might have kept it, remember! A big diamond is a great temptation to a poor devil like me!"

They were still laughing as the rickshaws rolled away.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

**I**T HAS been said that Daffy alone among the three sisters was a flirt. Psychologically, this is not so strange as it at first appears. Sylvia was too stupid, Susan too tragically bent on getting from life that which she coveted to be appealed to by the amusement in question. Whereas Daffy, too plain to attract by her looks alone, too interested in people to be passive, naturally, if only half-consciously, exerted her powers to please every one, man, woman or child, who pleased her. Hitherto she had had but few occasions to exercise her talents in this fascinating direction, but now the easy-going island customs made this practice very easy, and Nicko found himself frankly welcome at Moonflowers and his attentions accepted with a demure mischievousness that partly cheered his weary spirit.

Gunning, as usual, was busy. He had not wished to come to Ceylon, but now that he was there he could not, as he naturally put it to himself, waste all his time. So for many hours every day Daffy was left to herself while her husband wrote useful but very dull articles for Parliamentary use about the island and its industries. Gunning was glad that his wife found amusement in Skene's always available society. He himself had talked very little with the younger man,



but he knew that every house in the place was open to him and that he was technically a gentleman.

"Isn't he beautiful, Hughie?" Daffy asked once, and her husband laughed.

"He is—very beautiful, indeed, my dear. Does he make love to you?"

"A little—make-believe love."

Which perfectly true statement satisfied Gunning and sent him back to his work with a comfortable feeling that Daffy was amused, much as a mother might have left her child with a harmless, unbreakable toy. And Skene, who was extremely hard up and lived while in town in a very small room high up in a second-rate hotel, was more than glad to have a new pair of eyes to look into, a new table at which to satisfy his excellent and expensive appetite.

It pleased him to be accepted unquestioningly at his own valuation, and he was indeed very charming and quite irreproachable that first fortnight. In the shady drawing room they used to sit, and very often he read aloud to her or they arranged flowers in various vases—a graceful act in which he excelled. When he sang it was chiefly for his own amusement, unless he sang "Araby."

He chaffed her openly about her musical ignorance and in return she teased him for posing at the piano. They were very happy. Once he made her sit still for a whole day while he sketched her. The sketch was very bad and he tore it up, but it served his purpose, and he enjoyed watching her queer little pointed face.

Her clothes, "real proper clothes," he called them,

in contradistinction to the confections of the native tailors, pleased him, and the British ways of her, undimmed by tropical suns.

From the room he had adopted as a study Gunning used to hear them laugh, and was well pleased. At last came the often-put-off day for the visit to Nararavilla, Harscamp's tea plantation. Harscamp had a motor and drove it himself, Daffy beside him, Skene sitting at her feet. In the back seat Mrs. Harscamp and Gunning sat together.

Past Mount Lavinia, with its lovely crooked palms etched against the sky, and thence into the wild country, they went; past temples the paths to which were scattered with the white flower petals of offerings; through villages where brown children gleaming with cocoa-oil strutted about as naked as they had been born; they met a native wedding, all banners and gilt paper; were scowled at by tonsured and villainous-looking priests in yellow robes, each one carrying a palm-leaf fan, behind which they were supposed to hide their sacred faces from profane sights.

And once a huge tamil climbed a king palm by means of a short rope holding his feet together, and bringing down a cocoanut, cut the top off it, wiped the edges of the hole with his filthy turban and offered it to the ladies to drink.

There were very few cars in Ceylon, and in the remoter villages the excitement was great as they drew up for water.

And Daffy loved the babies, fat, small people with enormously distended stomachs, around which, sole

garment, was bound the red thread by which their mother measured their food-containing capacity. Skene, always voluble, always agreeable, always ready to do small services for people, was a charming companion. He had the gift of giving out scraps of amusing information, and he it was, rather than the somewhat heavy-minded Harscamp, who told Gunning the things he wished to know about rubber and tea. Gunning liked him, looked on him as a boy, and felt in his company much the sense of relaxation busy men sometimes find in that of pretty, rather silly women.

The party left Colorado at six in the morning and at about eleven stopped at the tea plantation for luncheon.

The owners of the place, two red-faced Yorkshiremen, gave of their best to the welcome guests, and when the meal was over took the Gunnings and Skene to the long wooden building where the fresh picked tea leaves go in at one door to come out at the other end, the shriveled scraps beloved of us at home.

The heat was great and Gunning hurried through the different rooms as quickly as he could past the squatting be-ringed brown women who first sort the leaves, past the great sifters shaking to and fro.

But Daffy loved the heat and the strong aromatic smell. She and Skene lingered in the sifting room.

"You like it?"

"Yes; don't you?"

He made a grimace. "Too used to its charm, I suppose. I've been five years at my rotten little place, and I'm poorer now than I was when I first came out.

That doesn't exactly arouse a passion of enthusiasm for tea in me."

Daffy looked at him as he leaned against the wall. The air was full of impalpable tea dust, through which the sun made a very beautiful atmosphere.

"How did you happen to come out?" she asked.

"I didn't happen to at all. My people sent me to get rid of me."

His handsome face was very dark as he spoke, his eyebrows drawn down.

Daffy was sorry for him. "How nasty of them!"

"Oh, I don't know. I was a bit of a nuisance—however, here I am, and here I suppose I must stay." His eyes rested wonderingly on her upturned face for a minute, and he added, "Upon my word, I believe you're sorry."

"Of course I'm sorry."

He was attracted by her, but the truth is that she was far more attracted by him. In the first place she passionately admired beauty, and Nicko Skene's beauty could be divined not even by those who best knew him. In his way he was as stupid as Sylvia. Daffy, moreover, had never been in love, she had never even had the feminine equivalent for calf love.

So it was perfectly natural that when, there in the strange surroundings of the tea house, the broiling sun gilding his hair and his slightly hollow cheeks and deepening the color of his wonderful eyes, the young man began to make love to her, something within her should instantly respond.

It was so natural for him to make love to an attrac-

tive woman that he hardly resisted at all. Why should he resist? He meant no real harm; he had nothing to do; his mind, when unoccupied by immediate amusement of some kind, was a turmoil of discontent and worry. There he was, there she was, and they were alone.

He burst out into a rhapsody of self-pity, described the misery of his solitude at his plantation, the ecstasy of his joy in finding her, his happiness in this little journey, so soon to be over.

He did not approach her, nor did he utter the word love, but it was love-making, and Daffy did not repulse him. She had seen Gunning's utter devotion to her sister, she had seen Ginestra's southern intensity and fire, she had heard old Mr. Wace talk of his love for his dead wife. But hitherto no one had loved her. Her only proposal before Gunning's had been made by Macclesfield, a mere boy who trembled at his own words; and Gunning's had not been romantic, in spite of the episode of the buried bouquet.

And now here was this magnificent, beautiful man telling her, the plain Daffy, that he loved her.

"You are not angry?" he added anxiously, as her answer failed to come.

"Angry? No—I am glad you like me."

Like had been his word, as it was hers.

"Amuses you, eh?" he went on, disappointed by her manner, and, lion-like, lashing himself into a fury.

Then Daffy looked up at him and mentally he started.

"I am not amused at all," she responded, "but I did not understand why you *should* like me. I am so ugly."

This he believed to be affectation, for she was not at all ugly to him.

"You know quite well that you are not ugly," he retorted impatiently, "and you know quite well that—" As he spoke a half-breed youth who was employed as a clerk in the shipping department came in to tell Daffy that Gunning wished her to come back to the house.

"Mr. Gunning says it's too hot here," the messenger added, showing all his teeth.

"That'll do, thanks." Skene's manner was very short.

"You may go. We will come at once."

They went out through the packing room among the crowds of be-ringed and be-braceletted native women, and as they came out into the blazing sun and Skene put up her green-lined umbrella, Daffy asked in good faith, "Why were you so cross with that pretty boy?"

"Because the pretty boy was impertinent. Beasts they are, all of 'em, every single one," he added, his brows down.

"Who? Natives?"

"He isn't a native. Half-breeds, I mean. They are all liars and sneaks and would be bullies if they dared."

"I have noticed that all of our Englishmen who live out here despise them, poor things, and it seems rather

hard. Some of them must be nice, and they are often good looking."

They were going through the dried-up garden of the overseer's wife, a piteous place, speaking of utter discouragement and slackness on the part of the owner.

Skene didn't answer, and Daffy went on, "I saw a perfectly beautiful young man the other day—Mr. Carstair said he is half Portuguese—Pedro something or other. I have rarely seen a handsomer man or woman, either, and my two sisters are remarkably beautiful. No one ever lived who is *quite* so beautiful as Sylvia."

Skene, who didn't quite see what Sylvia's looks had to do with the half-breeds of Ceylon, made no answer. Daffy wondered why he always looked black at any mention of black blood, but she was far more interested in the state of her own feelings and did not again speak till they had reached the bungalow and were seated in the comparatively cool depths of the veranda, where the rest of the party were partaking of pale drinks in tall glasses full of ice.

Her face, usually so white, was a little flushed and her eyes were bright.

"Are you all right, Daffy?" Gunning asked, looking at her. "It was too hot in the tea house—don't drink your lemon squash till you are a little cooler."

Daffy nodded and sat silent, while Mrs. Robertson, the overseer's wife, complained.

She complained of the heat, of the rains, of the lack of neighbors, of the quality of the neighbors she did

have; of the difficulty of obtaining good meat, of the iniquity of native servants, of the way kid gloves and silk stuffs rotted in the humidity, of the way her hair came out, of the delicacy of her children, of her husband's callousness to her sufferings, of the danger of cobras in the neighborhood.

There was nothing, Daffy thought, that God had thought well to do for Ceylon that satisfied the yellow-faced Mrs. Robertson, with her monotonous whining voice. And because Mrs. Robertson was yellow-faced and had a disagreeable voice, Daffy, the beauty-mad, felt very little pity, or indeed anything but impatient disgust for the poor woman's miseries.

Skene drank his peg and said little. Mrs. Harscamp was asleep upstairs, and Harscamp had had several pegs and was drowsy. It was a very dull party indeed.

When presently every one went up to rest Daffy sat by the window in her room and for an hour dreamed waking dreams.



## CHAPTER XXXVII

**T**HEY returned to Moonflowers the next day but one, but Daffy saw nothing of Nicko Skene for nearly a week. He had gone up country to his own plantation, a miserable place where, she knew, failure was writ large on everything.

And in his absence she missed him; missed him more than she had ever in her life missed any one or any thing.

It was unfortunate that at this juncture Hugh Gunning should have been particularly engrossed with his own personal interests. A certain political plan of large immediate import and larger potentialities for the future had been submitted to him by his political chief, and as it meant upheaval to a certain extent of his present course of life, his brain was busy. Daffy's slight petulance, a thing quite new to her, he set down naturally enough to the heat.

"Do try to keep quiet in the middle of the day, my dear," he said kindly, his blue eyes absent, "you look rather seedy and I believe your little face is smaller than ever!"

Daffy, who as yet had not arrived at a point where feelings are complicated, nodded indifferently.

"I will," she answered, like a child humoring a well-

meaning but rather boring parent, and he went back to his room satisfied.

Skene wrote twice. One letter simply excused himself for not having come to say good-bye, but the other was longer. "I am a fool, I suppose," it went on, "(but that is nothing new) and I loathe being here even worse than usual. I want to be back in Colombo. I want to come to Moonflowers, I want to see you. Don't be angry with me, Daffy. I can't help it. I'll stop now, or I'll say too much. Yours, N. S."

He had never called her Daffy. For a long time she sat with his letter in her lap. Then she rose and going to the table selected a very perfect sheet of paper and wrote what was her first love letter; wrote it without a qualm of conscience, her husband only two rooms away from her!

"I am not angry," she began abruptly, "and I am glad you miss me. I miss you, too. I have nothing on earth to do, and it is *so* dull here without you. I never said you might call me Daffy, but you may. Mrs. Harscamp is still at Newraglia" (she never learned to spell the word) "and the Lovels did not come on the *Moravia* after all. We dined last night at the G. O. H. with some people Hughie knows. I *was* so bored, as they all talked politics. Come back soon. Daffy."

This communication had the effect of keeping Skene two days longer up country than he had intended to stay. He was a rather knowing young man, and chuckled to himself as he read what Mrs. Gunning had written.

So far not much harm had been done, but trouble was brewing, and if Daffy had been a trifle more attractive to him it is hard to say what might not have happened. But he was only just sufficiently drawn to her to make a flirtation a pleasant pastime. "Damn it all! why can't I half care for her," he growled impatiently. "Lots of fellows would—" He swore at a memory that rose in his mind and then took a drink.

"Skene is back," Gunning told his wife two days later. "I met him at the club and asked him to dine."

"Good."

"Whom else can you get? Harscamp says his wife is coming to-morrow, but for to-night I can't think of any one."

"I don't want any one but Mr. Skene. He doesn't have to be amused, and it's too hot to talk much."

At half-past eight Daffy, all in white, stood on the veranda waiting for her guest. There was in her breast a pleasant flutter and her cheeks burned.

"I am in love," she said to herself, "and I like it."

Her thoughts absolutely went no further than this. Gunning and Skene did not appear to her in juxtaposition; Gunning, indeed, seemed to have very little if anything to do with the matter. If he had been her father he could not in her mind have stood more aside. This may have been simply because she had never loved him, or it may have been partly the result of her life-long knowledge of his love for her sister.

When Skene, on finding her in the fragrant warm dusk, tried to lose his head a little and kissed her

hands, she gave a happy laugh and drew him into the house.

"Oh, I am *so* glad you have come back," she said, and the catch in her voice stirred him a little. Emotionally, he was rather vibrant at all times and his looks were of the type that express far more than they ever really mean.

"I shouldn't have come." The cliché rose naturally to his accustomed lips, but she could not know that.

"Why?" she asked in perfectly real surprise.

"Because—Gunning—" Was she half a fool, he was wondering, or as deep a little devil as he had ever met?

At the door she turned and looked at him, her eyes lambent. "Hughie doesn't love me," she said simply.

No woman on earth but Christopher Lambe's daughter could have said it, but Skene, for his part, of course, couldn't know this.

Deciding that she was the deepest little devil he had ever met, and feeling with relief that the fact cleared his way and made whatever he might choose to do quite excusable, he followed her into the drawing room where Gunning was reading the last *Fortnightly*.

"How d'ye do, Skene?"

"How are you?"

They shook hands and then Gunning began speaking of a subject new to Daffy.

"Did you see your friend?" he asked.

"Yes. It will be all right for to-morrow. He says

there are a lot of 'em in the paddy-fields, so we ought to have a good day."

"A good day for what?" Daffy asked, sitting down and starting an electric fan.

"Snipe. Mr. Skene is taking me out to-morrow."

"Good gracious, Hughie, can you shoot?"

Gunning laughed with the good temper of a man who *can* shoot.

"A little, dear."

While the two were discussing the possibilities of the next day she watched them. Gunning's rather stern face did not gain by contrast with Skene's, whose perfect features were saved by the tropical sun from any hint of effeminacy. For all his beauty, he looked "hard," and compared to the energetic modeling of his chin, Gunning's looked almost indefinite. Daffy, like most people who know nothing of physiognomy, believed very much in the meaning of chins. There was to every one a look in Skene of beautiful alertness that had no bearing whatever on his actual character.

"He looks as if his mind were on tiptoe," a fat, red German scientist had once said of him, and the phrase had stuck to him. "Tiptoe Skene" was still his nickname. By the side of his radiant youth Hugh Gunning at thirty-seven looked a settled, rather dull middle-aged man. And this Daffy realized strongly.

Gunning's mistake had been in allowing her to go her own way since their marriage. He knew her own way to be harmless, and believed that he acted in kindness, but no own way can be good for a young wife, and now, unrecognized by himself, there lay at the

back of her mood a dangerous feeling that Hughie wouldn't care. After dinner Skene played and after a bit Gunning went back to his papers.

The drawing room was a cool and pleasant place, full of the scent of flowers; the lights were low; Daffy sat in a comfortable chair by the window listening to the music, the waves of the sea, and the things in her own heart.

"Daffy!"

The name sounded very sweet as he said it, and as he went on playing she was not obliged to answer.

She looked up and met his great eyes fixed on her. He was no drunkard, but he had dined well, and every kind of luxury had its effect on him. The world was made for pleasant things: good food, and wine, and music, and love-making. Presently, his eyes still on hers, the music ceased and without moving he spoke again:

"You don't mind my calling you Daffy?"

"No. I—said you might."

"You look so pretty in that frock. You look so young."

But she was too young to appreciate the latter compliment.

"I am young. But—do I really look pretty?"

"You know you do."

She shook her head.

"You've said that before. I don't know it. I've always been ugly, and—I never minded before. But if I look pretty now, I am glad."

"Are you? Why?"

He fully believed that she was making love to him, whereas she was as convinced that he was making love to her.

"Because," she answered, "I like you to like me."

She took up a little tortoise-shell box, in the lid of which was inset a slit of mirror, and looked at herself.

"I can see my own eye, a rather nice brown eye. Now I can see my nose. My nose, of course, really is good. It's even better than Sylvia's. But, oh, my big mouth. It isn't even very red, like girls in books, and then I have no color, and I am so little. I am," with disgust, "a shrimp."

"You are a dear," he returned, taking the box and her hand in his, and surer than ever that she was encouraging him.

At that minute Gunning came in at a window the other side of the room, and Skene, knowing that his love words could not have been heard, went on, looking at the box, "got it in the Pettah, did you?"

"What?" said Daffy bluntly. "Oh, the box. No, Hughie gave it to me—where did you get this little box, Hughie?"

Gunning looked at the two for a minute and then sat down.

"I've forgotten—one of the shops near the G. O. H., I think. Rather pretty, isn't it, Skene?"

And Skene knew that he had seen him holding Daffy's hand and said "damn" to himself. Gunning did not leave the room again, and when the arrangements were completed about the shooting the next day Skene took his leave.

"Daffy."

"Yes, Hughie?"

"You mustn't let that chap make love to you."

She looked up at him, not quite liking the tone in his voice.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Why *not*? Good heavens, can't you see why not?"

She walked to the window and stood looking out at the sea. For a moment she nearly decided to tell him that she and Skene loved each other. Then she changed her mind.

"He was holding your hand when I came in," went on Gunning patiently. He was a little shocked, but not at all jealous, and felt himself to be performing a duty.

"Yes."

"Well—you mustn't let him, that's all. Surely even you can understand that," he broke out, suddenly bored, his patience flying. If he was going to be obliged to watch her an end had come to his peace!

Daffy turned, blazing with rage as sudden as his impatience.

"*Even* I? Am I half-witted, then, that you say 'even'?"

"I didn't mean that—you know perfectly well that I didn't. Don't be absurd."

"Half-witted and absurd. Go on!"

Her disproportionate anger surprised him. He had not seen her in a temper for years, and the recollection of the last occasion coming to him suddenly—it was connected with the amputation by Susan of a favorite



doll's nether limbs—he unfortunately laughed. She was so utterly childish!

When after a pause she turned and he saw her face he realized his mistake. For the first time it was not childish. It was the face of an exasperated and indignant woman, and he marveled.

“Good night,” she said shortly, “I am going to bed.”

She marched out of the room without another word, and he stood for some minutes with his rather slow mind in a state of utter bewilderment. They had been married nearly three years and this was their first quarrel. There was about it none of the charm he had heard attributed to lovers' quarrels.

“But then,” he told himself rather ruefully, “we are not lovers. This is a—what's it they say?—a conjugal dispute. Oh, Lord!”

He knocked on Daffy's door, but she maintained an unbroken silence, and after a time he went back to his study.

“I don't understand her, after all,” he admitted to himself. “I've hurt her feelings and she resents it. But, after all, the fellow *did* have hold of her hand!”

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

**T**HE next morning Gunning and his wife breakfasted together as usual at eight. Daffy gave no sign of remembering their quarrel. She looked very tired and he knew she had not slept, but in answer to his inquiries replied merely that she was quite well. With two Cingalee boys waiting on them, padding in and out of the room on their noiseless bare feet, no more was said.

When Gunning started off in a rickshaw for the club, where he was to meet Skene, Daffy, as usual, accompanied him to the door and stood, a little pale blue figure on the veranda, waving her hand to him as he turned out into the road.

“Queer little soul she is,” he thought as he was whirled along in a cloud of red dust. “I suppose the truth is he had just grabbed her hand and I came in before she had time to snub him. If that is the case she of course resented my saying what I did. Although,” he went on just as usual, even to himself, “I had a right to object to what I saw, and she should have told me if I was too hasty.” If he had half liked Skene, the chances are that he would have said a few words of reproof to the younger man, whom he looked on as a mere boy. But for some time past a feeling of distrust had been growing in his mind—something

he did not attempt to define, but of which he was conscious every now and then, and this prevented his taking any open action. With a little bored sigh he realized that he must henceforth keep an eye on the chap.

"If he doesn't behave I shall tell him not to come again," he decided as he drew up at the club steps with a jerk that, in his absent mood, nearly shot him out.

There was in him no more distrust of Daffy than there was jealousy. If he had been forced to analyze his opinion of his wife it would have been summed up in the words, "She's quite all right, poor little dear, only so awfully young!"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Skene was ready, sir." The servant disappeared and in a few minutes the two men were on their way to the station, where they had a twenty-minute journey to their destination. Skene, looking his very best in a very ancient, beautifully cut shooting jacket, showed no signs of constraint. He was radiantly cheerful—as, to do him justice, he still had the grace of being on a fine morning. He was a rascal of many endearing little ways. This, too, was one of his good days, and Gunning felt his dislike again waning. "After all," he thought, half ashamed of his secret ungraciousness toward his painstaking host of the day, "I may be quite wrong. His good looks are of course against him, but—well, I hope I am wrong." Harscamp, who was at the station to meet his wife on her return home, sped them on their way and later told his wife about it.

"Gunning seems to like Nicko," he said. "At first I thought he didn't."

"At first," corrected Mrs. Harscamp, who looked much younger for her stay in the cool air, "he did. Like Nicko, I mean. Then he began to—not to dislike him, but to distrust him."

"Nothing original in that," laughed Harscamp. "Poor old Nicko must be used to rousing that particular feeling."

She shot a peculiar glance at him. "Yet you always trusted him," she said.

"Not I! I rather like him, and I am more than rather sorry for him. But as to trust—no, no, my dear! Two years ago, when the young scamp was always hanging round you, do you think I trusted him?" His big red hand closed partly over her little gloved ones. "My trust was in you, old girl. That's different!"

Mrs. Harscamp was silent during the rest of the drive home.

Meantime, Daffy, having come to a conclusion, set to work to carry it out. All night she had sat by her window thinking. For the first time in her life she was in love. It was as yet puppy love, such as a boy of seventeen might feel, but as such love is to a boy of seventeen the most vital thing in the world, so was this new feeling to Daffy. It was a sacred, splendid thing, and she was as proud of it as if she had been unmarried.

In her short life she had seen only three love affairs—Sylvia's two, one between a girl and a young Italian on the steamer between Vancouver and Yokohama.

And these three love affairs had all forged steadily ahead toward one end: marriage. Marriage had been the idea in the minds of all the six people she had seen in love, and young Macclesfield had used the great word with regard to herself. She loved Skene and Skene loved her. Therefore, Skene must want to marry her. To her it all seemed quite simple, and the most beautiful part of it all was that Hughie wouldn't mind.

"It's too bad I shall have to be divorced," she told herself, "but that won't matter."

The phrase recalled old Mr. Wace and his Lily. "It didn't matter!" And how glad her old friend would be when he knew that she, too, had now some one for whose sake she felt that nothing on earth would matter! She had seen the old pensioner only half a dozen times, but he was a friend. She would write and tell him all about it. Ringing for iced lemon squash, she settled herself in Gunning's study, which at that time was the coolest in the bungalow; and with one of Gunning's carefully wiped pens she dipped her pen into Gunning's inkpot and began.

"Dear Mr. Wace," she wrote in her round, boyish hand, "I wonder how you are? In London, of course, it is beastly now, cold and wet and foggy, but here in Ceylon it is grilling, and the sea is even bluer than my Italian sea, and the flowers are glorious and make the whole place smell like a scent factory.

"I am quite well again and haven't coughed once. How I wish your poor Lily could have come here." The old man's age and her as great youth had bridged

over the years since Lily's death and neither of them saw any discrepancy in her speaking of the dead woman as though she were a contemporary of her own.

"And now," she went on after a pause during which she drew little daisies on the blotting paper, "I have some news for you. I love some one very much. He is a young Englishman who has a tea plantation near here, and he is the most beautiful person in the world, after my sister Sylvia. I fear he will be upset because I am married, but that really doesn't much matter. My husband, luckily, does not care for me, and I don't blame him. I am much too stupid for such a clever man. It is a pity he didn't marry Susan, the clever one. But I suppose she wouldn't have had him. Did she ever go to see you? She said she wished to and that she would take you some books and some fruit from me. Don't forget that when Lady Archie Bel-lasis calls on you it is my sister—I mean to say, don't say you don't know her and refuse to let her in!

"Well, to go back to Nicko (that's his name, Nicholas Skene). He is poor, but well-born, and has the most beautiful manners in the world. I am so proud that he should love me. He even thinks me pretty. Isn't that nice?

"Oh, Mr. Wace, I so often think about Lily and you and her saying it didn't matter. Now I know what it means and how true it is. Nothing in the world matters but just Nicko. I'd just as soon be a beggar all my days if I could be with him. I have only known for a few days that I love him, and to-night when Hugh comes home I am going to tell him

and ask him to divorce me at once. He is so kind, I am sure he will do it without any delay. Nicko and I will come back to England to live, for we hate Ceylon. Poor dear, he has been here so long. My father will give me some money, I am sure, and we will buy a little house where the hunting is good and live there."

Thus Daffy, who loathed the English climate and would as soon have attempted to ride a wild elephant as the mildest hunter on earth!

"We were to have gone home the middle of April and stopped in Italy on the way, but now, no doubt, we shall have to come sooner on account of the divorce, and I shall see you soon.

"It will be good to have a long talk with you again. My love to you, dear Mr. Wace, and believe me to be always your sincere friend,

"DAPHNE GUNNING.

"P. S.—'Daphne Skene' is prettier, isn't it?"

Sending this bombshell to the poor old pensioner off to the post by one of the numerous boys of the establishment, Daffy sat down again to determine exactly what she should say to Gunning.

Any one, almost, of her mother's family would, could he or she have been able to read Daffy's mind as she planned, have declared that she was half-witted like her father. No one actually believed, of course, that Christopher Lambe was not in full possession of his faculties, but his wits, such as they were, were so utterly different from those of the Pember tribe that

the expression "half-witted" seemed to them most clearly to express the difference.

A lack of the possibility to realize the meaning of the word "impossible" has won for more than one man the title of genius. Daffy had not only the peculiarity of not realizing the meaning of that particular word, but to her "divorce" and "scandal" meant absolutely nothing.

She had no doubt whatever that Gunning could and would at once arrange matters for her. She had overstated nothing in her letter to Mr. Wace.

And now, after an hour's concentrated thought, she came to a perfectly definite plan of campaign.

"Hughie," she would say, rejecting all beating about the bush, not as unworthy, exactly, but as senseless, "Mr. Skene and I wish to marry, and will you please divorce me at once?"

No wonder a possible Pember would have doubted her sanity.

Then Hughie would want to know if she were absolutely sure that she would be happy with Skene. That he would be careful for her future she knew, and she faced bravely the boring necessity for discussion of the point.

"He will say he doesn't much like him and I shall have to talk a long time to convince him that he is the right man for me. Then the money question will come up, but I can easily make that all right. He knows that father will give me some. I *am* glad father is so rich."

The grounds for a divorce, or even that grounds



were necessary, did not occur to her. There was something touching in her conviction that Hughie would do everything for her.

At last, when in her mind everything was settled, she ate her solitary lunch and after a nap went out for a walk.

The sky had clouded over and it was close, though not so unbearably hot as it had been for the past few days.

Daffy walked slowly along at the edge of the dusty road, disregarding the curious glances of the native passers-by.

Unconsciously she turned toward the Pettah—the native village. She had been here once or twice with Gunning, but never on foot, and once in the heart of it she suddenly woke up to the fact that it was very interesting.

It was noisy as a parrot cage at a zoo and its smells were variegated and ungodly, but the shops were full of interest. For a long time she stood outside the little garden leading to a barber's shop watching the shaving of a coolie's head as he squatted on the earthen floored veranda. Half-naked brown men squatted everywhere, glossy brown babies swarmed everywhere, at a pastry cook's stall fearsome messes of aniline hues attracted chattering crowds.

Dainty little Cingalee women, in white jackets that left a band of brown skin visible between their edges and the beginning of the folded petticoat, tripped about, busy with their household concerns. Daffy backed into a big yellow priest and, begging his

pardon, received in return a volley of foul language which fell as harmlessly as a blessing on her uncomprehending ears. Suddenly the sun came out, flooding the sordid, dirty street with light and blackening the wide-spread palmetto fronds against the dazzling sky.

“Ugh, how it smells,” said Daffy, crossing to the other side of the road to avoid a very virulent dog-fight.

After passing a gaudily adorned temple on her left and watching the progress of a native funeral, she turned back and made her way homeward.

And now, on the opposite side of the street from that on which she had passed that particular part of the village, she observed a little bungalow set far back between two shops, but yet, because of the trees that surrounded it, possessing a certain degree of privacy.

It was a shabby, tumbledown little house, long since painted white, and from behind the curtain of colored beads that hung across the door came a sort of whining, rhythmical song, accompanied by the not unmusical clink of some kind of native instrument.

Daffy listened, glad of a little rest, for it was suddenly very hot, and the as sudden darkening of the sky boded a storm.

In the garden was a beautiful hibiscus tree aflame with flowers, and on the newly boarded but unpainted veranda floor lay scattered starry smelling white blossoms—temple flowers.

Beyond the hibiscus tree, between a pepper tree and a post of the veranda, hung a hammock in which

some one lay under a huge, bright colored Japanese sunshade.

The droning singing continued, and after a long pause Daffy was about to walk on when a figure coming toward her caught her attention.

It was that sad, tragic figure too often seen in British colonies, that of a drunken, gone-to-seed English gentleman. A tall man with a bulbous front, a swollen, red face and shabby brown linen clothes. It would have been hard to tell in what way he looked a gentleman, but in spite of his shabbiness and his present condition of half-seas-overness there was no doubt even in Daffy's immature mind.

As he reached her he gave a lurch, glanced at her sharply with his sodden eyes, and then, taking off his battered topee, said with painful distinctness, "Excuse me for speaking to you, but—you should be getting home. The Pettah at this hour is—is no place for white ladies."

Daffy drew back a little, but thanked him civilly.

"I am just going," she said. "I am not afraid."

"Excuse my speaking to you," he went on with the extreme gravity of the very drunk, "I—I am English myself. If—I were in fit condish'n," distinctness no longer possible to him, "but—I am not."

With a flourish he put on his hat and lurched into the gate by which they had been standing.

As he went up the path the hammock gave a sudden jerk and from it a small bare foot and leg shot out.

"Drunk again," said a musical voice, and then

Daffy saw, as the owner of the voice sat up and began feeling for a lost red slipper, very down at the heel, that had dropped to the mangy grass, a remarkably beautiful girl.

She wore a frowsy tea-gown of a once delicate pink hue, she wore no stays and her thick black hair had half come down and hung in an untidy mass at the back of her neck. She looked to Daffy about twenty-five, but was really just eighteen.

"Verree early to be so rotten drunk," went on the girl, lazily, without real resentment.

"Diss-gusting!"

The Englishman sat down heavily on the edge of the veranda and let his topee roll on the path.

"What a lovely, lovely girl," she thought as she turned homewards. "Almost as beautiful as Sylvia; better than Susan—oh, yes, much better than Susan. What a wonderful skin—like magnolia leaves."

Before she reached the end of the native town a great clap of thunder seemed to shake the world and she ran for her life. Poor Daffy—she was not yet really grown-up, in spite of her nearly three years of matrimony and the great age of twenty-two. She enjoyed her run through the darkening streets and the excitement of reaching home just before the rain came down as if the heavens were a great bucket and had turned over.

Several rickshaws stood before the door and a sound of agitated voices greeted her.

"Hello, Hughie," she called, seeing Gunning's big figure in the darkness of the veranda, "what's up?"

The servants are making—" Gunning held out one hand to stop her words, but did not rise.

"For God's sake, be still," he said in a voice she hardly recognized in the hiss and roar of the rain, "an—an awful thing has happened. I have shot Skene—he will lose—an eye."

## CHAPTER XXXIX

ONE morning in April an austere-looking woman in the blue and white uniform of a London hospital nurse knocked on Hugh Gunning's study door at Moonflowers.

When he called out, "Come in," she obeyed and stood looking at him for a moment before she spoke. Then her hard face softened a little. "He is ready to come down, sir—if you will come."

Gunning, who sat at his table, bowed his head for a moment and then rose.

"I am ready," he said.

In the brilliant sunshine it was plain that his smooth brown hair was streaked with gray and that his brown face had a curiously wasted, ravaged look. He had suffered mightily, and was still suffering.

"How is he?" he went on presently as they made their way down the long bare corridor.

"He is quite well, sir. It is a fine constitution," Miss Archer answered judiciously. "The shock of such an operation is usually much more severe."

At the door of the room whither they were bound Gunning paused. "I—I am a coward, Miss Archer," he said.

She laid her hand for an instant on his arm.

"No, you are not," she answered firmly. "You are

only—a very sensitive man in a particularly painful position. Try to endure it a little longer. He will be able to move in a fortnight, and by that time you must be going back. The heat is terrible even now.”

Her plain, sensible face was very kind. To her Hugh Gunning’s suffering made him nearly a patient.

“If—if only he weren’t so patient,” he said, his words stumbling a little. “His lack of resentment hurts more than anything, I think—”

Miss Archer sniffed. Even a duchess may sniff occasionally. “I shouldn’t bother about his lack of resentment if I were you,” she said dryly. “Some people would say that the Lord is tempering the wind.”

Gunning nodded wearily and knocked at the door. As he opened it his big figure collapsed limply against the lintel. If he had stood free of support he might have fallen.

Before him in the middle of the clean bare room stood Nicholas Skene, dressed very carefully all in white. His curly hair shone in the sunlight, his illness had succeeded only in half bleaching the sunburn from his face, so that he looked less like an invalid than like some demi-god in modern clothes. Invalidism and probably—so material are the means that contribute to spiritually appearing earthly things—invalid hours and fare had given his beautiful face a kind of delicate radiance that was hardly human. And over his left eye, neatly bound round his curly head, a dark green silk patch lay like a blot on the fairness of his face.

It was the first time he had been fully dressed, the first time he had been free of bandages.

When he saw Gunning he smiled, a smile, it seemed to the poor fellow he greeted, of almost unearthly radiance.

"Am I not smart?" he said. "I am so glad it isn't black; green is so much more becoming!"

"Don't, Skene—that's a good fellow, don't chaff about it, I—I can't bear it."

And Skene's face changed. "Sorry, Gunning; I didn't mean to hurt you—I say, it is jolly to be properly dressed again. Let's go downstairs, shall we?"

Miss Archer watched the two men as they walked down the passage together. Gunning walked stiffly, like a man on parade, but Skene had taken his arm and leaned on it half playfully.

"Humph!" said Miss Archer, and she sniffed again. She had been with Skene since the day after his accident and she had seen Gunning daily. Her mind regarding them both was well made up.

Meantime they had reached the drawing room and gone in. Skene was laughing, Gunning grim and silent.

Daffy, who sat by the window, rose so hastily that she upset a small table on which stood some knick-knacks and a vase of flowers.

The water streamed over the floor, and as she bent to pick up the vase Skene darted forward and knelt in the débris.

"Oh, you have got your trousers wet," she exclaimed.



He rose, set the vase down on the table and felt of his left knee. "I didn't see the water," he said simply.

Then Daffy, looking at Gunning, felt that she almost hated her husband for the coldness in his face. Poor Skene had not seen the water because his left eye was gone, and Gunning, who had done the damage, looked on as unmoved as if he himself had been both blind and deaf.

Skene held out his hand to her. "Please welcome me downstairs, Mrs. Gunning," he said. "*I am so delighted.*"

But Daffy, white-lipped, was staring at his green patch. "I—I—oh, I am *so* sorry," she stammered, the inadequate words ringing horribly absurd in her own ears.

Skene, who had his hand in hers, turned and held out his left one toward Gunning.

"Now look here," he said genially, "I know how dreadfully sorry for me you both are. And I am, of course, sorry for myself to a certain extent. But—that bullet was cast to go wrong and disable me in some way, and I greatly prefer a green patch to, say, a wooden leg or an empty sleeve."

As he spoke the white-robed butler came in and set down on the nearest table a big tray on which stood an array of iced drinks of various kinds.

As Gunning and Daffy remained silent, the young man went to the table, poured out two modest whiskeys, splashing the glasses with syphon, and handing Daffy a lemon squash, gave Gunning a whiskey and took one himself.

"So—please don't let's talk about me any more. I mean to say, about my late eye. Promise me this, or I shall be miserable. And now, please drink with me, will you?—to the Green Patch."

Automatically Gunning drained his glass, his eye fixed in its depths. Daffy sipped at hers with her quaintly pointed upper lip, and set it down.

"I think," she said deliberately, "that you are simply—splendid, Mr. Skene. I admire your pluck more than I can say. And I will try never to mention—it—again. Only——"

"Only me no onlies! It is agreed. And you, too, Gunning." But Gunning had gone quietly out through a window.

"Poor chap!" murmured Skene. He was genuinely sorry for Gunning, but he was far sorrier for himself, which was perfectly human and natural.

Daffy, somehow, looked prettier to his one eye than she had ever done to his two; at the humor of this idea he suddenly laughed, and she at the sound burst into tears.

She had suffered unspeakably since his accident and her nerves had been strung up to breaking point. Now the breaking point had come.

It was sweet to Skene that she should weep for him, and he had been for long days in complete darkness, and then for many more nearly as wearisome restricted in the matter of women's faces to Miss Archer's, to which he had not felt at all drawn.

Daffy's little white visage all a-tremble, her big eyes bubbling with tears, the piteous baby-like shake

of her upper lip, went to his head. Before she knew what he was about she was in his arms, her nose smashed flat against the buttons of his coat, his mouth close to her ear as he muttered little broken words of love to her.

"It is so awful, so *dreadful*," she gasped, wriggling to put her nose into comparative safety, "I can't bear it."

Then he kissed her face, and for a minute she was quiet.

"Poor, darling little Daffy," he said softly, "was she so upset! She mustn't cry, though, no! she mustn't. Hush, dear, you *really* mustn't."

But Daffy must, and did, and for quite five minutes, and when at last she wiped her eyes on his beautiful, smelly handkerchief, it pleased him to see that her delicate little nose was not in the least discolored or her eyes swollen.

"So you do care for me," she said, giving him back his handkerchief.

"Of course I do! Did you doubt it?"

"Yes. I was sure you did before—and then when you wouldn't see me all that time, then I thought I had been mistaken."

"I didn't see you because I was—not well enough," he answered. But his real reason had been one of coquetry as keen as was ever that of a woman. With bandages over his head, his chin and cheeks unshaven, he would see no lady. This green patch, in its mute pathos, was, he knew, not without a certain æsthetic value. It was in a way almost becoming.

"Well, that's what I *thought*. So I haven't told Hughie."

"Told him what?"

"About us."

He looked at her aghast. "Why should you tell him, in Heaven's name?"

Daffy laughed. "Oh, you needn't be afraid. He won't mind," she assured him. "He doesn't care for me, you see, so he won't care at all."

Skene stared hard at her with his one big eye. Was she a little mad?

"Won't mind what?" he stammered stupidly.

But Daffy's mind was quite clear. "Why, about us, of course. I never told you about how he came to marry me, did I?"

"No."

"Well—sit down, and I will." As she spoke, she herself sat down, and folding her thin little hands, began with something the air of a child with a good story to tell.

"You see, I am the youngest of three girls, and both the others are beautiful, not pretty, but real beauties. And Sylvia, the elder—she is Duchess of Ginestra now—is a very, very great beauty. Well, Hughie knew us all when we were little children and he fell in love with Sylvia then. He never loved any one else. He loved her *awfully*. And when my mother died he came to the funeral, and after it (mother had known he loved Sylvia) he asked her to marry him. Of course she said she would. Anybody would, he is so nice."

"Oh," commented Skene, wondering whether, after all, his illness had made his head so queer.

"Yes, and they were engaged until the following spring, and then she married the Duca di Ginestra."

"But why? I—I don't seem to understand."

Daffy looked at him critically. "I don't see what there is that's hard to understand! It's all perfectly simple! She married Gianfranco because she fell in love with him; because he is very handsome. It seems rather quaint, doesn't it, that first Sylvia and then I should desert poor old Hughie because another man is handsome? Why, it nearly killed him when she did, and as I said, he won't mind at all when I do. Well—then for a long time he was very miserable and when father and I came back from Japan, he was better. He came to Sorrento——"

"Why to Sorrento?"

"Because that's where we lived. Father has a lovely house there—and he came there and—well, I'm sure I don't know why he asked me to marry him, except that I am Sylvia's sister."

Skene leaned forward, his hands on his knees, and looked at her closely.

"And why did you accept him? Were you in love with him?"

"No. I never was in love with any one till I met you. But—oh, well, it was time I married *some one*, and dear old Hughie was so nice. Father was awfully pleased."

"I see——"

"So that's how it all happened! Isn't it lucky that

he doesn't care for me? I should hate to have to hurt Hughie."

Skene wished he knew how to get out of the room. He wanted to think. What she was planning he could only guess, but he was definitely ill at ease, and wished to be alone to think.

It was like his wretched luck that just when to her no difficulties seemed visible, they loomed largest to him. And the worst of it was that she had never been half so attractive to him as now, when he began seriously to doubt her mental balance.

He rose. "I think I had better rest awhile now, if you don't mind," he said. "I am a little tired," and Daffy flew to his side.

"Lean on me, and I'll go with you to your door. No, lean harder. I am very strong."

Her eagerness to help touched him. She was so utterly unlike all the other women he had honored with his attention—although these ladies were many and of various types—her strangeness in a subtle way flattered him. He was pleased with himself for being capable of appreciating her queer little charm, as some people are proud of liking caviar.

"You are very good to me," he murmured. "Tomorrow I shall be stronger and we can talk it all over. Please don't say anything to Gunning until we *have* talked it over."

"Oh,—don't you think I had better tell him at once?"

She looked up at him, surprise in her eyes.

"No, dear. There are things you and I must settle

first. Now here we are. Thank you very much, and I will rest. Good-bye until to-morrow."

He kissed her gently, and then, although it was only eleven o'clock, went back to bed to insure solitude for his reflections. What he was to say to her the next day he had not the remotest idea, nor what in the name of Heaven she would say to him. Her idea of telling Gunning was, course, absurd to the verge of madness, but he had no doubt he could convince her of its absurdity, so it did not matter.

What did matter was, he realized, what he was to do next. He knew himself well enough to realize that as soon as he was a little stronger he was going to fall in love with her.

He had not had a little love affair for some time, and he knew that this one was now inevitable.

"If he finds out I shall have to leave—and I do want to go to Europe as he suggests to see that oculist chap in Switzerland—even Baffy ought to do something for me when he sees me with one eye gone."

Baffy was his particularly long-suffering, but finally disgusted eldest brother.

"I wonder why I never really thought of her till that eye was gone. She isn't even pretty, and I'm quite sure she's a little mad. And yet——"

He sighed as the nurse pulled the green shutters to and left him alone. He knew too well that matters were now what he called out of his hands. And they probably were. Self-control does not grow in a day, nor do principles.

## CHAPTER XL

**T**HE next day, for some reason, Skene was worse; he woke with a bad head and a little fever and the doctor ordered him to stay in bed.

Daffy was much disappointed, for she was burning to tell the story to Gunning and had promised not to before she had again seen Skene.

She wandered restlessly up and down the house all day, her face set in its queer scowl, and once when Gunning spoke to her, her voice, for the first time since their marriage, held its old gruff bass note.

"Are you not well?" he asked, absently taking a mango and looking at it as if he had not the least idea what he was to do with it.

"Quite well," she growled, adding after a pause, "thanks."

Gunning was away most of the afternoon. He had a new trick of staying out for unexplained hours at a time, and would come in looking exhausted and covered with dust.

Probably, if he had been asked where he had been he would not have known, but no one asked him. Daffy was utterly engrossed in the glorious egotism of her first love. That particular day he did not come in until just before dinner, and Skene, looking pale and ill, sat in the drawing room.



"Ah—glad to see you are down," the elder man said, his face setting firmly as he shook hands with his guest. "Are you better?"

"Yes. It was only a recurrence of the headache."

"Have you seen my wife?"

"No, I only just came down before you came in."

As he spoke, Daffy entered, carrying a great bunch of purple, bell-like flowers that filled the air with a strong scent.

"Oh, you are down!" Some of the flowers fell to her feet in her surprise and Skene picked them up after he had shaken hands with her.

"What lovely flowers," he said, a little sharply, holding them to his face. "I didn't know you had any here."

"No, we haven't, they were sent to me."

Gunning drew away from the strong-smelling things.

"Who sent them, dear?" he asked civilly.

Daffy selected a vase for her present. "Would you mind ringing for water, Hughie? I don't know who it was. A lady, Johnson said; she came in a rickshaw."

Johnson, who was Gunning's valet, answered the bell, and when he had left to fill the vase, Skene said to Daffy, not looking at her, "I wonder who the lady was, Mrs. Gunning. Perhaps Mrs. Harscamp."

"Oh, no, he knows her by sight. A young lady, he said it was."

"Violet Dawson, probably, then."

Johnson returned just then and Daffy, constrained

by a feeling that she must do so, although the mystery did not greatly interest her, asked him about the lady of the flowers.

"I don't know who it was, Madame," the man answered, "it was a young lady, and—she was very pretty, if I may say so—in fact, Madame," he went on with the respectful confidence of an old servant, "she was—well, the most beautiful lady as ever I saw in my life, barring 'Er Grace."

Daffy turned in surprise to Skene, but he had gone to the piano and stood with his back turned to her, looking at some new music that lay there.

"Thanks, Johnson. But who on earth can she be?" she continued, as the servant left the room. "Have you any idea, Mr. Skene?"

Gunning, who was watching the young man, noticed his face as he turned. "I? No, Mrs. Gunning. I had no idea we were favored with the presence of such beauty!"

"That," thought Gunning, as he went to his room to dress, "was a lie."

His brain, almost physically weary of turning over and over the hideous, hopeless thought of Skene's mutilation, seized on the new idea of the lady of the purple flowers with something like relief. Skene knew who she was, and he would not acknowledge it. Why?

All through dinner he was busy with this new thought, though the subject did not come up again. Skene was a little silent, excusing himself on the plea of not yet feeling quite himself. "A headache is the

very deuce, isn't it?" he added patiently, and Daffy answered warmly.

Gunning's attitude of indifferent silence she took greatly to heart. It looked to her like utter heartlessness, and the more angelic Skene was, the more indignant she became.

Presently the conversation turned to their approaching return to England, and she turned to Skene.

"How long is it since you have been there?"

"Nearly four years."

"Is it, really! Well, you will be very glad to get back, won't you?"

Skene took some wine very slowly before he answered. Then he said in a quiet voice, "I fear I shall not be able to go, Mrs. Gunning."

"Not go! But why?"

"To be quite frank, I can't afford it."

Daffy glanced quickly at Gunning, who was drawing patterns on the table-cloth with a fork.

"But——"

"You see," Skene went on with an air of simple courage, "I have wasted a lot of time this winter, and things have gone wrong. I have to take the consequences, that's all. But don't be troubled, Mrs. Gunning. I am nearly quite strong again, and I shall, I dare say, be able to manage a few weeks in the mountains." Gunning didn't look up. His mouth was fixed in its grim line; he didn't speak.

Daffy drew a deep breath as she looked at him.

"Well, you *must* come to England, that's quite certain," she said, two little spots of red burning in the

whiteness of her face. "It is entirely my fault that you have 'wasted time,' so I wrote to my father just after the—the accident, and I had a cablegram to-day, asking you to come over as his guest for a long stay. You *will* like my father," she added hastily, "he is the greatest dear in the world. And he will like you. He has such a pretty place at Sorrento, and he wants you to go there first for a month or so, and then he is going to England, and wants you to go with him. His eyes are a little troublesome, he says, and he is going some time during the summer to Lausanne to see the big oculist there, and——"

"Rather a long cablegram," commented Gunning harshly. Then he rose and left the room. Daffy stared defiantly after him for a moment and then looked at Skene.

"My dear," he said softly, "he knew that that was a fib."

"Then," growled Daffy in her hoarsest voice, "I hope he is as ashamed as he ought to be. Oh, Nicko, I am so ashamed of him. I can't understand. He never was unkind before."

Skene came to where she sat, and laid his hands on her bare shoulders. "Look at me," he whispered, something in his voice that stirred her in a quite new way.

"Oh, no, you mustn't kiss me!" she faltered, her black head pressed against his shirt front, "not yet."

He drew back, as surprised as he was annoyed.

"I can't understand you at all," he said angrily. "Why do you flirt with me?"

She rose and faced him. "I *don't* flirt with you," she retorted, angry herself. "That is not true. But I don't think it would be *nice* to kiss me before we have told him."

Skene failed absolutely to understand that she was sincere. To him her attitude was a not unskillful one of coquetry, and it piqued and led him on as no amount of simple love could have done.

He seized her and kissed her violently several times.

Poor little Daffy! when he let her go she stood before him panting and scarlet, her eyes wet, her mouth quivering. She was torn by two very different emotions, but only one of them found words. "You mustn't, you *mustn't*," she protested, almost wildly, "it isn't fair. It's horrid!"

"Thanks! I kiss you because I love you, and you say it's horrid!" His pale face flushed with anger and hurt vanity.

"I don't mean that—you know I don't! I mean that it isn't right yet. Hugh will not mind after I have told him, but he hates sneaking, and *I will not sneak!*"

She had never in her life before called her husband Hugh.

This Skene, of course, did not know, but in her anger and her new dignity she appealed strongly to him, although he saw in her mental attitude but an absurd pose. He liked pose, however.

"You have a fine little temper of your own, I see," he teased, "I am positively afraid of you!"

But her seriousness remained unbroken.

"I will go and tell him now," she declared firmly.

"You mustn't."

"But why?"

"He'd scold you."

"Nonsense. He never scolds me. Good-bye. I will come back—no, I'll come to the drawing room in about—well, it will take a long time—in half-an-hour, say."

And before he could stop her she had left the room and he heard her knock at the study door.

Gunning was not in the room, but as she opened the door he came in at a window.

His face had a peculiar expression, but she was too self-engrossed to notice it.

"Hughie," she said, "I have something to tell you."

"Sit down, Daffy."

But she remained standing. He never forgot the picture she made in her white frock, her hands tightly clasped before her, her brows drawn intently together.

"It is this. I know you will not mind, so I can tell you in a few words. I want to marry Mr. Skene, Hughie, so will you please divorce me?"

Gunning sat down suddenly, and burst out laughing. "So will I please divorce you? My dear child, have you gone mad?"

"No, Hughie, I am not mad at all. I—I love him."

He was silent for a moment, and then he said, suddenly grave, "Daffy, dear, if—if you dislike me too much to stay with me, you may go home to your father. But before you go, you must realize that it will cause a great deal of talk, which you will not like.

‘And your position as a woman living apart from her husband will not be so good as the one you have now—even with me,” he added a little bitterly.

“But I don’t want to go home to my father,” she insisted, her eyes fixed on him.

“As to your marrying Skene, you shall certainly never do that,” he continued, disregarding her interruption.

“But why? It isn’t as if *you* loved me.”

“That has nothing to do with it. Skene is not a good man. He would not be good to you.”

Daffy flushed violently. Then she extended both her arms in a queer theatrical gesture he had never before seen her use.

“Oh, you brute, you coward,” she cried hoarsely, the words stumbling over each other, “to say that of the man whose life your carelessness has ruined. ‘Criminal carelessness’ *I* call it. Other men don’t hurt their friends, and you have always been proud of your shooting——”

“Be silent!” he thundered.

It was a strange moment. She had never before seen him as angry as lay in him to be, and her deep indignation, unjust as it was, struck him by its very intensity.

Both of them, more angry than ever before in their lives, were at the same time impressed by the unexpected revelation in each other.

“I will not be silent——”

“You will. You are not yourself. You have insulted me in a way I shall never forgive.”

“And you, in insulting the man I love, have insulted me. I repeat that I consider you a coward. I have no more to say.”

Very quietly she left the room, and Gunning, after staring at the closed door for several seconds, stumbled to a chair and sat down.



## CHAPTER XLI

GUNNING got no sleep that night. After leaving the dinner table he had walked about the garden for some time, and then an evil chance had brought him within eye-shot of the scene in the dining-room just as Daffy tore herself from Skene's arms.

Gunning was too far off to hear what the two were saying, and his sense of dignity did not allow him to stand and watch, but he went away into the darkness with, printed in his mind, a picture of his wife, a flushed, tremulous woman, wakened at last to womanhood by another man.

Over and over again he recalled the scene, as the short, hot night wore on.

And it did not occur once to him that his first impression as to Daffy's reason for making her remarkable request might have been wrong.

She had, he believed, seen him in the garden, and her coming to his study had been merely a suddenly inspired bit of feminine diplomacy.

His slow, honest mind was stirred to disgust by this conviction.

Her accusation of cowardice regarding Skene, too, hit him in a very raw place. It was horrible to him that he could not like the man he had so terribly injured.

He felt that his distrust of Skene was an added hurt to the young man. He had many days before suggested Skene's going back to Europe with him and his wife, to see the oculist in Switzerland, but since making the suggestion his dislike of Skene had so increased that he felt he could not face the journey.

In some way without hurting the fellow, he had been thinking he must arrange that the journey must not be made together.

It was very horrible to him, thus to plot, for Hugh Gunning was a generous-minded man, but his dislike of Skene was stronger than his reason; he could not overcome it.

The knowledge, too, that Daffy saw his dislike and mis-read it as callousness, had hurt him severely. But he was one of those men who seem, once their emotions come into play, incapable of explanation. It was impossible for him to even make an effort to convince his wife of her injustice. All he could do was to set his teeth and endure his misery as best he could.

And now the worst had happened, and the poor little fool was in love with the man she regarded as her husband's victim.

Why Gunning's sense of justice should have failed him in a matter so vital as his judgment of Daffy's reason for telling him of her infatuation, it is hard to guess.

It may have been because his brain was already over-tired, it may have lain in the fact that he knew she had as a child been untruthful.

Whatever the reason was for his mistake, in its way

as vital as hers about his mental attitude regarding the accident, it held good and widened the breach to a very dangerous extent.

Morning, however, found him resolved to make an effort to keep her from rushing into the folly she contemplated.

At about eleven o'clock he sent for her to come to his study. They had not met before, and wished each other a sedate good-morning. Then he began gently, "Daffy, I am sorry I was harsh last night. And I wish to tell you something that will perhaps explain to a certain extent why I maintain that Skene is not a good man. I saw him kiss you last night."

Now Daffy was still ashamed of that kiss, but she was far too angry to admit it.

"Well?" she asked defiantly.

"Do you think it nice, as you say, to come to a man's house and make love to his young—his *very* young wife?"

"Nonsense! If the young—the *very* young wife permits it, why not? I tell you, I love him."

"There is, believe me, nothing new in that situation. You are not the first woman who has——"

But Daffy was seized with one of her fits of eloquence and burst into a torrent of words that tempted him to stop his ears.

"I know all that, and all that you are planning to say. And it is all wrong. I have been perfectly honest with you; I came and told you that I loved Nicko Skene, and that we wished to marry; and if he has kissed me, what of that? Don't people who love each

other usually kiss each other? I let him," she lied, "and I liked it. I liked it *very* much. He loves me, and that is more than you ever did! Oh, I am not reproaching you; I always knew you'd never love any one but Sylvia, and I am glad you *don't* love me, but—" she paused for a moment, and then with a crowning effort of fierceness added the supreme injustice: "But *you* knew what love is, and I didn't, because I was too young, and you had no right, no right, I say, to cheat me out of my chance of happiness!"

There was a long pause, and then Gunning said quietly, "I see what you mean, and I am sorry you think that. Everything you have said is untrue as well as cruelly unkind, but that doesn't matter. I will take you to your father and leave you there. But I will never—understand me once and for all, please—I will never either divorce you or let you divorce me. The man is not straight; oh, I don't mean because he kissed you—there are other things—I have heard men talk about him, and I have noticed a hundred trifles I didn't like, and you shall *not* ruin your life by marrying him."

"Ah, I see. I congratulate you on your perversity, Hughie. First you maim and disfigure him, the most beautiful man in the world, and then you refuse to let him be happy. Very well. I will go to my father, and if he cannot convince you that there is only one thing that you can in common decency do—then I will run away with Nicko Skene, and every one shall know what you have done."

"This is silly rot, Daffy. Try to behave like a grown woman. The fellow hasn't asked you to run away with him, has he? And I greatly doubt if he would have the courage! Did he tell you to come to me last night? I greatly doubt that, too."

Daffy caught a deep breath and tried to speak, but she was done, and in place of words came tears.

Poor Gunning at once softened. She was so little, so young, so unutterably foolish!

"Don't cry, Daffy," he said awkwardly, "I am sorry I was hasty. Try to believe that I am thinking of your ultimate happiness. And I am *sure* it does not lie with poor Skene. God knows I—" he broke off; the words expressing his grief about the accident would not come. After a pause he went on: "He's a type I know well, dear. He's a woman's man; he's had half a dozen love affairs even out here. He knew yesterday who the lady was who brought you the purple flowers—ask him. I saw his face."

Daffy had nearly conquered her tears now, and was scrambling for her pocket in an unrestrained childish way that gave him a little pang of amusement in the midst of his pain.

"It isn't true, he *does* love me. He said so."

Hope shot into Gunning's heart. "I'm not saying he doesn't love you. No doubt he does—in his way. But it isn't the love that lasts, I could swear. It never occurred to me that he loved you. He doesn't *look* as if he did. You don't know, my dear, how many emotions there are that go by the name of love without even approaching it."

Having found her handkerchief, Daffy blew her nose.

"It's the kind of love that pleases me," she declared finally. "If you had had the—the humanity to kiss Sylvia even once, *really*—she might not have got bored and thrown you over. Then all this trouble would never have been."

Gunning, remembering the great measure of his beautiful reverence for Sylvia, felt as if her words had desecrated a temple.

"Don't!" he ejaculated sharply.

"All right, I'll not say any more. I wish to go to Sorrento at once. I suppose you have no objection?"

"None whatever. A boat goes to-morrow. We can catch it quite easily."

"I wish to go alone, please. Oh, you needn't be afraid," she added with an absurd little air of hauteur, "Nicko will not come until I send for him!"

"Very well, you may go alone to-morrow. The Porter-Whytes are going and they will——"

"'Look after me?' All right. Thank you."

She left the room without further delay and a little later he heard her maid's heavy footfall in her room overhead, as she tramped from box to box packing.

"Curious," he thought, lighting a cigar, "how she looks like Sylvia when she's angry. Not that Sylvia ever was angry," his mind went on, loyal as ever to the memory of his youthful love, "but Daffy's mouth *is* so like hers when she is in a rage. Poor Daffy!"

He was unspeakably miserable; life indeed was hard to bear. After shooting Skene, it had seemed

nearly unendurable, but now Daffy's madness increased the misery tenfold. If Skene had been a good fellow, he thought, he would not have minded, but as it was, poor Lambe, he would be dreadfully shocked. "I wonder if she is right, after all; that I had no right to marry her when she didn't know? But I thought I could make her happy."

With a stab of remorse he remembered his forgotten promise, made to Lambe the night before they sailed, not to let Daffy be lonely. He had not recalled the conversation until now, and now he recalled as well his father-in-law's uneasy manner and queer little speech of adieu. "I believe he saw trouble ahead," he reflected.

Like most honest people his self-reproach overreached itself, and he took to himself all the blame from the very beginning. But Daffy's attitude about the accident he could not forgive. She might, she should have seen that his sorrow was beyond expression, that he simply *could* not talk about it; that the green patch Skene wore was to him like a great blot on the fairness of the world. He saw it everywhere. And when he met Skene suddenly, or if the young man, turning quickly, displayed the thing, it was as if he, Gunning, literally could not bear it.

Skene's seraphic patience, in which he could not force himself absolutely to believe, made matters worse. If only the young man had been petty and unreasonable! But he was always gentleness itself, and Gunning, distrusting his gentleness, felt himself to be a monster of suspicious uncharitableness even while in

his heart he *knew* Skene was not what he termed straight. Hours passed and Gunning had not left his study.

At last, toward six, unable to bear the stress of continuous thought any longer, he went for a walk. As he passed through the garden to the gate, he met Daffy returning home in a rickshaw. "I have been about my cabin," she said civilly. "I have got a very good one."

"I am glad. Where is Skene?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him at all to-day. This morning his head was bad. Sly of him to have headache, isn't it? And as to the green patch, I call it very dishonest of him to wear it."

Her childish malice hurt him horribly. Without a word he passed on, and a little later found himself in the native village.

But after threading a difficult way through the evening crowd there for a few minutes, the smells became too much for him, and he turned up a narrow lane leading to the left toward the Cinnamon Garden.

Here it was quieter and the smells were less virulent. Presently he came to an open road, which was lined with sunburnt pepper trees, and where a slight, warm breeze was stirring.

Gunning was very tired, and with dragging footsteps took the footpath to the right.

His mind had gone back to the political plan that had been submitted to him. It pleased his ambition, but its charm had gone, somehow. He was too tired



to take pleasure in anything. "‘For Cassius is a-weary of the world,’" he thought sadly, and then laughed at his own vanity in comparing himself to the brilliant Roman.

But a-weary of the world he was, nevertheless. The trouble ahead of him was peculiarly repellant to his orderly mind. An obstreperous wife had never occurred to him as one of the griefs life might have in store for him.

Divorce he looked upon with uncompromising eyes, simply as disgraceful.

"Whatever comes," he said again to himself, as he entered a path thickly shaded by trees hanging over a high wooden paling on his right, "that shall not. Besides, the poor little thing doesn't really love him. It's calf love, the romantic nonsense she should have gone through at eighteen."

And then he stopped suddenly as if he had been shot. Some one had spoken on the other side of the paling.

"I tell you, I won't have it," the voice had said, angry, authoritative. And it was Skene's voice.

"Why, dee-ar," drawled some one else very musically, "how can you help it?"

"I'll beat him to a jelly if it happens again. That's how I'll help it!"

The woman laughed. "Why, dear Apollo, then what should *I* do? Don't be sillee. Now tell me the news. How is the little ladee? Did she like the flowers I sent her?"

"Aha! I knew it was you. How dared you?"

She laughed again. "I am not afraid. Why should I be? I am a verree good girl, as every boddee knows, and I am daughter of an English gentleman! When Pedro told me, then I laughed very much. It was so funnee. And one night, I went to Moonflowers and I crawled close to the windows and I looked in. Oh, verree prettee! And Mr. Apollo Skene sitting so close, so close, his eyes half shut—so. He had *two* eyes then!"

The laugh made Gunning's blood rush indignantly to his face, but he had sat down on a bench that stood in the dark shadow of the trees and deliberately listened.

It was the first dishonorable act of his life, but he had no scruples.

Presently he saw a knot-hole in one of the boards of the paling and crept quietly along the bench and put his eye to it.

The garden, he saw, was neglected and untidy. At the far end of it an open door showed a small strip of a dark, dirty kitchen, in which a woman sat, with her back turned toward the garden. Just inside the palings was a battered steamer chair, and in it sat the woman who laughed.

She wore a dirty white dress tied round the waist with an orange-colored sash. Her hair was hidden by a violet straw hat, adorned by dingy white plumes. Her hands and arms to the elbow were bare, and of a peculiar dusky bronze hue. From his place Gunning could not see her face, but the hands were the hands of a woman possessed of some sort of power. They

were carefully tended, too, though a little dirty, and a heavy gold bracelet shone on one wrist.

"Pedro was looking very handsome at the wedding," she went on, her hands curving round each other in evident enjoyment. "It was a verree prettee wedding. We had pink champagne. Pedro kissed mee!"

There was a crash as Skené, in jumping up, knocked his chair over.

"Look here, Blanziflor," he said, his voice rough with strong emotion, "I swear I won't have this; I can't stand it. I'll do that dog some harm, I tell you."

The beautiful dusky hands in the white lap ceased their sensuous motions and stiffened suddenly. "Don't be cross, Nicko," she said, "you frighten me."

Then Skene knelt by her, and with both arms round her, he muttered things Gunning could not hear.

The girl, turning a little, bent and kissed the curly head in her lap, and then as they sat motionless, Gunning for the first time saw her face. It was so beautiful that he caught his breath. "Who on earth can she be?" he asked himself. She had said she was the daughter of an English gentleman, and she certainly was as fair as many dark Englishwomen, but her hands were not the hands of a white woman. Chi-chi!

Any one used to the East would have known at once by the way she spoke, but Gunning only recognized it now.

"Blanziflor, I love you," he heard Skene whisper brokenly, "be good to me; don't torment me. Isn't it enough that that swine has destroyed my eye and maimed me——"

"God damn him," interrupted the girl calmly, "I hate him. I should like to tear out *his* eye with my fingers."

"Oh, he didn't mean to, but it was brutal carelessness at the best—smug fool. It makes me so angry when I think of all his money, and all he can do, while I——"

The girl took off her hat and sent it sailing away over the gravel. Her beauty now was amazing.

"But why you make love to his wife?" she asked, frowning suddenly. "Pedro told me. I know."

Skene did not answer at once and Gunning waited, breathless, for his answer.

"Well, I'll tell you the truth, shall I?"

"Yes, Nicko, dear."

"It's this way, then. You had been beastly to me, your father had been making another row at the bar at the G. F. H., I was furious with you and ashamed of him, and, she's a nice little thing," he added, "and I had to make love to some one."

The callousness of this last statement did not shock the girl. "And she fell in love with you and made love to you," she suggested, without malice, "and—oh, yes, I see. It is verree simple. Well, and what are you going to do with me? I don't believe you really love me. Not as Pedro does!"

"Damn Pedro."

"Yes, but Pedro is rich. And he will marry me. To-morrow, if I like!"

Gunning was almost sorry for the unconscionable Skene, as he saw his face pale at her words.

"My God, Blanziflor, you know I'd marry you tomorrow if I had the money. But I couldn't even pay the parson!"

"Well, then, what do you mean to do with me?" she persisted. "Why do you not go to your Mr. Moonflower and say to him, 'Look here, you shot out my eye, give me money for it.'"

"Nonsense, I can't do that. Try to remember that I was at least born a gentleman," he retorted crossly.

"All right. If you cannot marry me, then I will marry Pedro," went on her sweet voice.

Before he answered her Gunning's attention was attracted by an old native woman who came out of the kitchen. She was very ancient, very wrinkled, very black, and she was smoking a pipe.

The girl, seeing her approach, spoke sharply to her in some native dialect and the half-naked old creature turned obediently and ambled back into her lair.

"You don't like my dear grandmother," laughed the girl in lazy amusement.

Skene groaned. "She is *abominable*. I—I can't bear to think of her—it is loathsome."

"And yet she is my mother's mother! 'And such a handsome Portuguese gentleman loved her! My mother was prettee, and I am the beautiful Blanziflor Truscott; my father is an English gentleman! Verree nice."

Gunning understood. He had once seen a very much intoxicated Englishman staggering up the main street, and some one had told him the story. "Poor old

Bill Truscott—lived here for thirty years; married a half-breed—gone utterly to smash.”

And this beautiful creature was the result of the marriage.

Two things were made plain with merciful rapidity to Gunning. He need have no further compunctions about Skene, whom he could easily buy off; and with such evidence as this in his hands Daffy could not possibly refuse to be convinced of her lover's baseness. Very quietly the eavesdropper crept away from his bench and made his way, after a long tramp in the Cinnamon Garden, homeward.

## CHAPTER XLII

**W**HEN Gunning reached home the first thing he saw was Daffy's luggage going down the avenue in a bullock cart.

The steamer, he knew, sailed early, and he went at once to the drawing room to make sure that she had not already gone on board.

She sat at the writing table sealing a letter, her mouth screwed up earnestly. For a moment she did not see him and he watched her with a great feeling of pity and tenderness in his heart.

She was unjust, and cruel, and absurd, but she was so little, so wan in the warm evening light; she was the same pathetic little Daffy whom he had picked up that night years ago in the boat off the Sussex coast. And now he was going to rescue her again! The quaint thought gave him a kind of melancholy pleasure. Would she again assure him of her age and perfect ability to take care of herself?

She looked up to find him, his face, kind as of old, bent toward her. "Why, Hughie," she said, with a little gasping surprise, "how queer you look!"

Then she remembered and drew herself up with much dignity. "I have sent my luggage to the steamer," she said, "and Hemming and I go early in the morning. I have written you a long letter to read after I have gone. I was going to put it on your

table just before I left, but you might as well take it."

"Why didn't you pin it on my pincushion?" he asked with a little smile.

"Why your pincushion?"

"That's what most women do who are deserting their husbands!"

But his joke seemed to her out of place.

"I suppose you won't mind my talking to Mr. Skene after dinner?" she said severely; "there are things I must explain to him."

Gunning hesitated, overcome by a sudden fear of hurting her. It seemed like executing a baby with a sixteen-pounder.

"Daffy, dear," he said, "did you ever hear of a very beautiful girl here, named—let me see—Blanziflor, yes, Blanziflor Truscott?"

"No."

"Well, her father's a drunken Englishman, a gentleman once, poor wretch, who married a Portuguese half-breed. They live in the Pettah, in a tumble-down bungalow."

Daffy remembered. "Oh, yes, I have seen her, also the father. The bungalow has some absurdly pretentious name; I've forgotten it. But why, Hughie, what about her?"

"Skene is in love with her," he said bluntly, unable to find words in which to clothe properly the ugly, naked fact.

"I don't believe it," she answered flatly, and it was clear that she did not.



"But it is true. He would marry her if he could. I tell you, I *know*," he persisted.

"It is not true at all, and I didn't think you'd do such a thing. I'm going to dress and—" she moved toward the door, but paused on her way, one hand raised in an attitude of listening.

"Here he comes," she said quietly, "now you must let me tell him what you have said."

"Very well."

Neither of them was ever to forget the two minutes they stood in silence, listening to Skene's light footsteps as he came up the roadway, into the house, and across the hall.

When he opened the door he paused, struck by something in the atmosphere.

"Nicko," Daffy began at once, without preamble, "I have told my husband that we love each other and that I wish him to divorce me."

"You have told him—yes, I know, last night," stammered the young man. "Well—" he turned, as was his habit, so that Gunning could not fail to see his green patch, but this time Gunning, for the first time, did not flinch.

Gunning was silent for a moment, while the other two, recognizing his intention to speak, waited.

At last he said to Skene, "Well—and when I have arranged the divorce, you wish to marry my present wife?"

Skene was very pale, and later they both remembered that he had been pale when he came in.

"Yes," he said slowly, "if she will do me the honor."

Gunning was surprised, but his face did not show it. He had left his knot-hole too soon.

"You will, I am sure, recognize my right to make sure before I take any definite steps in the matter that her happiness really lies with you?"

"Of course." Skene arranged the ribbons that held the patch in place as he spoke, but again Gunning did not wince.

"Then—excuse my abruptness—you *love* Daffy?"

"Of course he does," she interrupted eagerly, "and you have no right——"

"Hush!" said Gunning. Then he again waited.

"I do love her. Yes, of course, I do. Now are you satisfied?"

There was something like a snarl in his voice as he brought out the words, and he looked away.

Daffy shot a reproach-laden glance at Hughie.

He was doing what she wished, but he was not doing it graciously, as she had expected. She was conscious of a feeling of disappointment in him.

"Yes, I hope you *are* satisfied," she said with dignity.

"Stop! I am *not* satisfied. Listen to me, Skene, and Daffy, watch him well. I have a proposal to make to you, Skene. I have the intention of buying Harscamp's rubber plantations. I have felt ever since that most unfortunate accident—for which God knows I shall suffer all my life, that I ought to make you some substantial reparation for the loss—the loss of

your eye, which you sustained through my miserable carelessness.

"Now the Black Hill Plantation is, I believe, a very fine one. I wish to give it to you, not because I imagine for one minute that it will in any slight measure make up to you for your terrible misfortune, but because I wish you to be—because—well, in short—because I wish you to have it. You will allow me this pleasure?"

"The Black Hill Plantation—why it's—it's worth—it's one of the best on the island," stammered Skene—"I really couldn't——"

"Wait a moment. I am a rich man. I can quite well afford it. That's beside the question. I have one condition to make. You will guess it."

"That he gives *me* up, of course," sneered Daffy, with deep scorn. "Hughie, I *am* ashamed of you."

"Yes, that he gives you up and *marries* the woman he really loves, Blanziflor Truscott."

Skene groped behind him for a chair and sat huddled in it for a full minute before he spoke.

"Blanziflor—I don't understand."

"Yes, you do," contradicted Gunning sternly, "you understand perfectly well. Be a man, Skene. Tell my silly little wife the truth. She doesn't really love you any more than you love her. Come, it won't kill her, you needn't be afraid!"

Daffy went and stood by the coward in the chair.

"Why don't you answer?" she asked him curiously. "Answer him, Nicko."

Skene moistened his dry lips with the tip of his tongue. "I—I—" he stammered.

"Hurry up," Gunning looked at his watch. "My offer holds good for exactly two minutes longer."

He stood with his eyes fixed on the galloping second hand. A minute passed and sweat broke out on his brow. Suppose the fellow were, after all, too vain to expose himself to Daffy. Suppose he counted too surely on Lambe to help them out; suppose a definite break had taken place between the Truscott girl and Skene after he, Gunning, had left.

Skene breathed hard, his face livid behind the green patch. Gunning fixed his eyes now on the green patch that was to him a symbol of so much suffering. Was his whole life to be ruined by it?

Daffy stood very erect, her eyes on the sea. She was curiously motionless.

"Thirty seconds more and your chance is gone," said Gunning. "Twenty seconds—ten——"

"I—I accept it," stammered Skene, rising and stumbling toward the window, "I'm ill, I'm going to faint."

"Get some brandy, Daffy, it's true, he *is* fainting."

Daffy rushed to the dining-room and came back with a carafe in her hand.

"Here, Skene, drink this, it's only brandy—no, no, you must *take* it."

Gunning's voice sounded like a doctor's, Daffy thought vaguely.

Then Skene stood up, drawing a deep breath.

"Sorry to have made such an ass of myself," he murmured, "I—I had a queer turn."

"Yes, but you're all right now."

"Dinner is served, Madame," announced Thompson, in his startlingly every-day voice.

"I must go." Skene turned to Daffy. "You will excuse me."

"Of course," she said civilly, but Gunning detained him.

"One minute. You accept my offer of the Black Hill Plantation, and you admit that you love this young lady?"

"Yes." After all, there is some good in most people. Skene drew himself up a little and faced them with a certain dignity.

"I have known Miss Truscott for four years, nearly, I have always cared for her. But it all seemed hopeless. You probably know that her mother was a half-caste, and you will have seen her father. I'd have married her, however, any time these four years if I could. But I hadn't a penny. This very afternoon I said good-bye to her, and I—I am very fond of—of Mrs. Gunning. I should have tried——"

"You may leave that out," declared Gunning.

Skene cleared his throat. "As you say, Mrs. Gunning has been misled by her pity for my—my accident (about which you are inclined, I fear, to think too much), I am sure that her feelings for me are really only those of—of friendship and pity."

"Wait a moment, Mr. Skene!" Daffy's voice was very cool and remote. "Pity only—but friendship! I

have been an utter fool and, all things considered, I don't blame you for—for resigning yourself to accepting me with the luxury you know I probably meant for you. But friendship! Oh, no."

She walked away to the window.

Skene flushed. "This is most unpleasant," he said awkwardly, "and she is very unjust. I will go."

"Unpleasant, yes," corrected Daffy from the window, without turning. "Unjust, no."

"Good-bye, Gunning."

"Good-bye, Skene, I will arrange it all with my solicitor as soon as I get back. I have your address. And you do believe in my—my everlasting sorrow about your eye?"

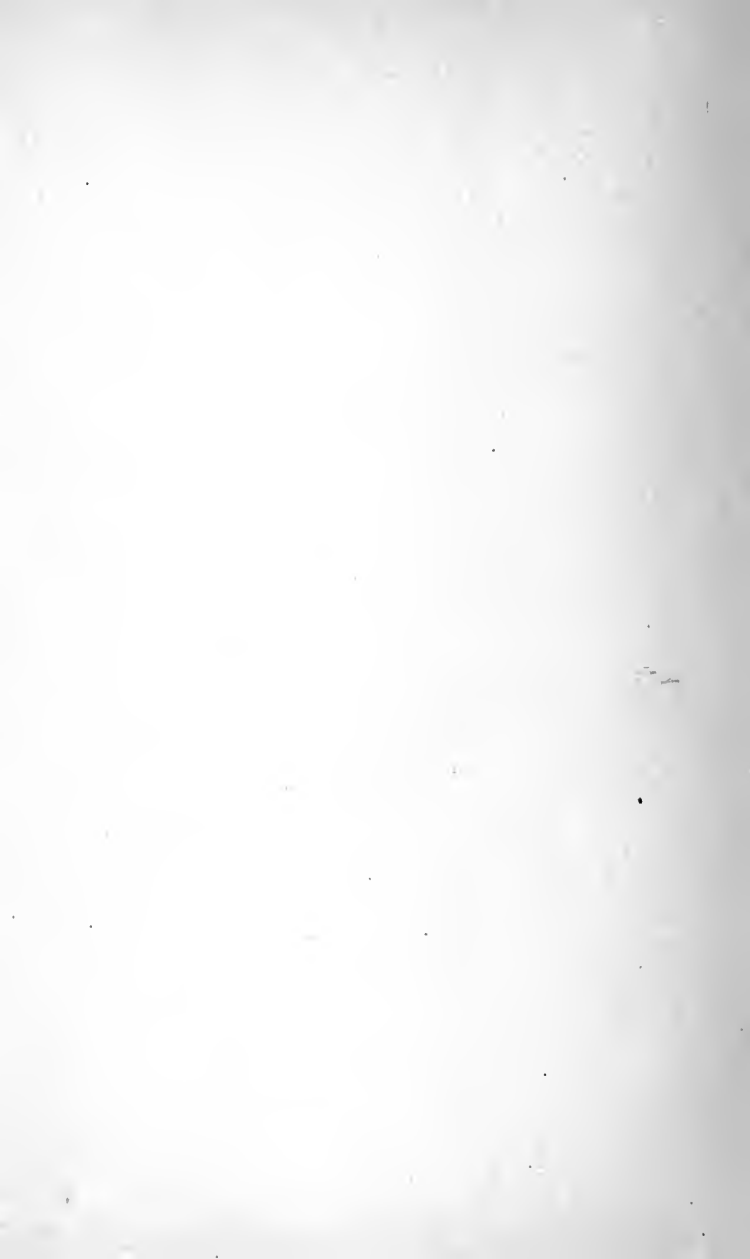
Skene nodded gravely. "Yes, I do, of course I do. And I hope—I hope things will be"—he glanced at Daffy.

Gunning frowned a little. "Good-bye," he said.

Then Skene left, and Gunning went to where his wife stood by the window.

THE END











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